

Lovell's International Series

The Black-Box Murder

BY THE
MAN WHO DISCOVERED THE MURDERER

Authorized Edition

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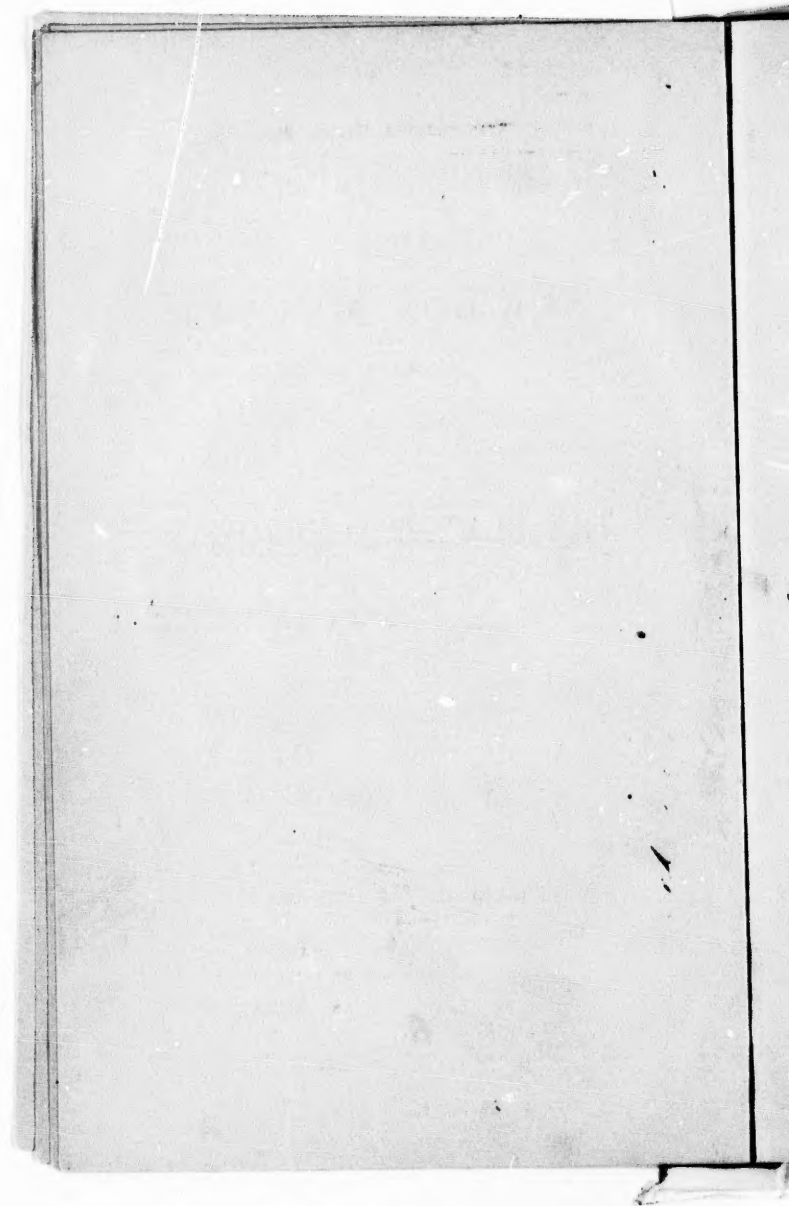
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THE BLACK-BOX MURDER.



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Lovell's International Series, No. 123.

THE
BLACK-BOX MURDER

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BY
THE MAN WHO DISCOVERED THE MURDERER

Jozua Marius Willem Schwartz

Authorized Edition



NEW YORK
UNITED STATES BOOK COMPANY
SUCCESSORS TO
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150 WORTH ST., COR MISSION PLACE

(1890)

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THE BLACK-BOX MURDER.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCES THE AUTHOR.

If I sit down to-day to write my account of what is known at Scotland Yard and among the newspaper people as the "Black-Box Murder," it is because, truthfully, after long consideration, no man appears to me better qualified than I to speak on the subject. I am not in any way alluding to the literary point of view; literary capacities I never have possessed, and, therefore, wisely shall not seek to acquire. They have nothing in common with the life I have been leading these last thirty years, except in so far as I was

always wanting a little of everything in that life, and of nothing too much, so may as well warn every reader, on this first page of the story, that he must not look for writers' beauties in a plain record of plain facts. My book will have no artistic value. It does not pretend to anything of the kind. It is the story of a bad deed cleverly executed, and cleverly discovered, some men said at the time.

I said a true thing just now about myself to start with. "A little of everything, and of nothing too much," nor the same thing too long; that has always been the maxim of my life. It is a bad maxim. I have put my hand into a score of money-bags, and drawn it out again before I had properly closed my fingers over the treasure inside; and there's many an ungrateful scoundrel at this very moment—sleek-faced and smooth-coated—who has me to thank for stepping too hurriedly out of comfortable quarters that he could occupy in consequence.

Ten years ago I was, during some eighteen months, in the employ of a private inquiry office. Never mind how I came there. I had been a good many things before then, and I have been a good many things since; but at that time I was a private detective. I was about forty years old—a little more. I had taken up the trade, under the pressure of adverse circumstances, as a means of earning an honest penny, at a moment when I was badly in want of that indispensable article. My pennies have always been earned honestly, I am glad to say, whatever various pockets they may have come out of. "An honest penny!"—heaven knows, the expression is sufficiently accurate. In all my roving I have rarely come across an opportunity of earning an honest pound.

Ten years ago, at any rate, I was working as a private detective. I liked the work, and I think it suited me. More's the pity that I had to give it up before I saw half as much of it as I might have done.

But even during the brief period of my connection with the office, I came across—"stumbled across" were more correct—one great "inquiry," which I was enabled to follow up to a satisfactory conclusion.

It is of that case I am now anxious to write the record. Nobody knows much about it except myself. It never reached a court of justice, and the papers alluded to it in a very fragmentary manner. The facts were not communicated—one by one—to eager reporters, as they would have been if Scotland Yard had managed the business.

I shall tell, then, what I know about the "Black-Box Murder." It is years ago since it was committed, and the persons concerned in the tragedy, for whose sake I have kept silence, are dead or have dropped out of sight. I myself am a sick man and a disappointed one, shunted off the lines before my time—a man with whom the world has dealt hardly, and who, perhaps, has dealt hardly with himself; and

I like, now-a-days, to recall that episode out of my life, and I like to talk about old times, and about that time best, so I give my story to the world.

One thing more. It has nothing to do with the story, but it may have something to do with my way of telling it. I was a gentleman once—thirty, forty years ago, at school, and—afterwards. I don't know whether that sort of thing rubs off when one's coat gets shabby.

CHAPTER II.

INTRODUCES THE BOX.

It was at the Gare du Nord in Paris. The mail had just come in from London *via* Calais,—6.30 P.M., I think it was, or thereabouts,—and the passengers were hunting up their luggage in the great room with the horse-shoe stands, where the customary official examination takes place—"used to take place," I ought perhaps to have expressed it, but I daresay that part of the business remains unaltered still. I had come over with the boat, and, as I had no registered baggage, and my little hand-valise had been opened on landing, I was free to depart in peace. But I strolled, all the same, into the bare, bustling "Salle des Douanes," for I had to keep an eye on my "party"—the people I was watching on behalf of the office. I was in atten-

dance—unknown and undesired—on a young couple who innocently believed they were running away from their respective papas. They were very fond and harmless, those young people, and I could see him eagerly unstrapping her boxes and dropping her keys. I had an easy time with my lovers, and plenty of opportunity for looking about me.

So I wandered in and out among the excited, irritable groups, in search of something to interest me, and it was not long before my attention was attracted by an old lady and her daughter, who stood before a mountain of, as yet, unopened luggage. How well I remember first seeing them standing there, and how little I guessed at the time—but that is an expression I am stealing from some novel I have read, and I have sworn to myself to eschew all pretence at fine writing, for what is the use of mounting a horse which you know beforehand you can't ride?

It is true, however, that those two ladies

were to play an important, though not the principal, part in the tragedy of which this was—for me, at any rate—the opening scene. One of them was old, as I have said—at least, she seemed fifty or thereabouts—fat, fair, and fussy, with a hot face, an agitated manner, and a loud voice. The custom house formalities were evidently a great trouble to her, as they are to so many people, and she stood there complaining to her daughter, and grumbling at her maid, and appealing to the cool, green-coated officials in a rather comical manner. The daughter—a tall, impressive-looking girl, with a quiet fire in her dark eyes—did not seem to approve of her mother's noisy agitation.

“Hush, mamma!” I heard her whisper repeatedly. “He will attend to you immediately. It will be all right, you may be sure.”

“But I do hope, Edith,” answered the mother excitedly, “that they will not open your tiresome black box.”

"If they ask," said the daughter unconcernedly, "I shall tell them it contains photographic apparatus, that is all."

As she was speaking, an official, who had been standing idly by, magnificently indifferent to entreaties from all quarters, condescended to lurch lazily in their direction, and was immediately hailed afresh by one of the porters in blue blouses, who had constituted themselves guardians of the English ladies and their plentiful luggage.

"Have you anything to declare?" queried the officer, in French.

The old lady had spread out the contents of her traveling-bag on the counter before her. She took upon herself to answer in voluble English.

"Oh, no," she said, "or, at least, I mean yes. There is this eau de Cologne, only the cork's drawn; and there's a little Irish whisky in this case, and I have a pound and a half of four-and-sixpenny Souchong, —four-and-sixpence, cost price, at the London stores,—and that is all."

The official—I remember he was a surly-looking, yellow-faced Frenchman, with a tawny moustache—listened attentively. He let his eyes wander contemptuously over the very neat collection of boxes and baskets ; then he pointed to a large, brass-fitted trunk.

“ *Ouvrez-moi ça,*” he said. He looked a little farther. “ *Et ça,*” he added ; and, as he uttered the words, he laid his hand on an oblong box.

“ Oh, not that one, mongsew !” cried the old lady in a flutter ; “ it is such a trouble to unfasten the cording, and we had to do it up in that manner because the lock is not sufficiently safe.”

The custom house officer did not reply. One of the little blue porters attacked the knot at the top of the box, which was secured crossways with a stout rope. I happened to notice the knot as the man’s fingers fumbled over it.

The young lady bent over the partition.

“ We should feel obliged,” she said, in a

low, earnest voice, and correct, though indifferent, French, "if you would order one of the other boxes to be opened. That one is troublesome to undo."

The official bowed.

"I am desolated, mademoiselle," he said, "but I have designated the black one. I can make no alteration," and he moved away to the next group.

The girl drew back, looking annoyed and offended. She turned upon her mother with what I considered unnecessary asperity.

"I told you so," she said, "but you would have that rope put round in London. It is the very thing to excite suspicion, mamma."

"*You* know who advised it," said the mother helplessly.

She seemed past caring. She was occupied in keeping the porter's dirty fingers, as far as possible, from digging down among the snowy linen in her own big trunk, and she was angrily repeating

to them her orders to call the "mongsew" back instanter.

The little group amused me. I could see my couple of turtle doves busily engaged over their brand-new luggage still. They must pass near me in going out.

I turned again to the ladies by whom I was standing. I was close behind them. The yellow-faced functionary had come back; he had tumbled the clothes about in the trunk, and had passed on with a splendid gesture of clemency to the black box. The rope had been loosened.

"*Les clefs,*" said a porter. "*Donnez les clefs.*"

The young lady held out one on a bunch. It was a common brass key.

"That is the key," she said.

They fitted it into the lock, and tried to turn it. It would not work.

"*Ce n'est pas celle-là,*" said the man.

Somebody tugged at it and twisted it, but in vain. Somebody else drew it out,

all bent, and began trying another key on the bunch. But the girl stopped him with a swift movement.

"That is the key," she said, "and no other. You need not injure the lock."

They tried again.

"Burst it open," said the customs officer in a low voice. "That is not the key."

Burst it open! The command was mercilessly obeyed, in spite of the older lady's indignant and imploring protests. The young one said nothing. After that one unavailing appeal, she stood silently defiant.

The lock was forced, and the lid thrown back. A white towel lay over the contents of the box, unequally spread out in little heights and hollows. Full in view, on the towel, were the letters "E. R.," marked in red.

One of the men drew back this cloth. I stepped forward, from sheer curiosity, to see what there was in this wonderful box they had had such a trouble to open. A

mass, strangely doubled up—a parcel, apparently, wrapped in a black cloth—or shawl—very heavy, whatever it was—a—great Heaven, no—a human body—the body of an old woman dressed in black!

I shall never forget that moment. Even now, all involuntarily, my hand trembles with excitement as I recall it after so many years.

There was nothing in the box but that white towel and the body, which had been wedged in and battered down so as to keep steady. It had been squeezed into this improvised coffin with the head pressed tight against the stomach, the legs having been lifted up and rolled round. It was very much pushed out of shape; it had stiffened in this position, and they had the greatest difficulty in dragging it out.

I had been too much occupied with the box itself to remember anything else. I now looked round, and perceived that the old lady had fainted away, and was lying helpless and unnoticed on the floor, while

the young one stood as if struck to marble, pale to the lips, staring, staring at the dead body which the officials had laid out on the table. All the travelers still left in the room came crowding round, and there were cries of horror and amazement. My own unsuspecting clients were among the rest.

"*Il faut en finir*," said an official with a broad silver band round his cap. He had only just recovered from his surprise. Several of the policemen who always stand about the doors had come up. The room was cleared, the dead body carried away, and the two ladies walked out in custody. What am I saying? Is this how men write history? The old lady remained unconscious, and they had to lift her up like a second corpse. It was the young one who marched past me, white and erect, with a *sergent de ville* on either side. They took her away to some other part of the building, through a side door, while I found myself pushed out into the great court-

yard, where I watched my young couple get into one of those convenient little station omnibuses, and heard them order the driver to take them to the Grand Hotel.

I have already said that I had accidentally noticed the knot of the rope round the black box. I recalled this circumstance as soon as I stepped out into the air.

The knot had been fastened by a left-handed person.

CHAPTER III.

WHO DID IT.

HAVING safely deposited my fugitives in their hotel, and telegraphed to the young lady's father, on whose behalf I was working, I walked leisurely down the boulevard, ruminating on the strange scene of which I had just been a casual spectator. I was far more interested—to tell the truth—in the ladies whose unexpected arrest I had witnessed, than in the pair of cooing lovers whom the office had entrusted to my care. The case of these lovers was not especially attractive, of a surety. The young man was the son of a gentleman of large property, and the young woman's relations were by no means averse to the idea that matters should reach a stage which would render backing out an impossibility. No secret would be made of the elopement.

I was there in the character of a spy, and a possible witness. You have to take the work that comes to hand in an office such as ours was.

But the essential point for me was that I should be certain to be detained in Paris for several days at any rate, with plenty of free time at my disposal. So much the better. I threw myself with increased ardor into the examination of the mystery I had accidentally come across.

Two perfectly harmless-looking, common-place English ladies, travelling from London to Paris with a certain number of harmless-looking trunks and boxes, and in one of those boxes a human body. Not a commonplace circumstance, that last item. What did it point to?

Murder, undoubtedly. Of that one might well be certain from the very first. Here was a case of murder accidentally discovered in a most singular manner.

Murder! A detective immediately asks, By whom? It is the first question—the

natural one—which suggests itself, even before those which have reference to the person murdered. The identification of the body will probably be possible tomorrow, the capture of the murderer *may* not. "Who is it?" "Who did it?" The two pull together, but "Who did it?" pulls hardest in the detective's brain.

I had, as yet, no opportunities for answering either of these questions, but I could not help repeating them all the same. Two females and their maid—but never mind about the maid for a moment—had been arrested with the corpse in their possession. What did I know about those two females?

Next to nothing, you will say. True, and yet, in my then profession, a great deal.

I knew, to begin with, their name—or the name they called themselves by. I had already seen "Mrs. Orr-Simpkinson, passenger from London to Paris," on a number of luggage-labels. "Orr-Simpkin-

son," doubtless, was what the old lady called herself; and, whether it happened to be her correct name or not, it was undoubtedly the one she had left London under. I knew, secondly, where they came from—or, rather, I knew where they came from last. The two ladies, and the box, *and* the body, had been in London that morning up to eleven o'clock.

I knew, moreover, the incidents of the discovery, and I carefully recapitulated them. The question before me was as follows: It is, of course, as yet impossible to say who committed the murder, but is it worth while to take either of these two females, and work her out as a possible "case?" I put the old lady on one side for the moment. Her behavior during the scene—her whole personality—seemed to preclude the idea of her being a murderess.

There was only one serious point against her. It was not so much her reluctance to having the box opened, as the cord

would account for that, but it was the fact of my having heard her own daughter say to her in an undertone,—“I told you so, but you would have that rope put round in London. It is the very thing *to excite suspicion*.” But even those words might have been used with a general meaning; and, at the worst, it seemed most unlikely that the mother would ever prove to be anything more than an accessory after the deed.

But the daughter? There appeared to be a good deal more reason to distrust the daughter. She was, as I have said, a dark, impressive-looking girl, with plenty of character in her face, and did not look the kind of person who would draw back for a trifle. Still, one does not soon accuse a harmless young lady, travelling with her mother, of the most terrible of crimes. But then, few young ladies travel with corpses in their trunks.

The young lady's anxiety not to have the box opened had been extremely

marked. Natural in itself, perhaps, it had, under the circumstances, become suspicious. And another item, in addition to this, appeared of still greater importance. When summoned to obey, she had refused the key.

There was no doubt in my mind that the key she had proffered was the wrong one. She had refused the key.

What reason could she have for doing so, unless she was anxious to prevent the opening of the box at any cost, and expected the officials to give way, and content themselves with some other article of luggage? She had reiterated that the key was the right one. It evidently was not. She had told a lie.

I have noticed, during my brief detective career, and I have found the remark repeated by colleagues of far greater experience, that, when you find any one willing boldly to speak or act a lie, you may safely presume the possibility—not more than the

possibility, mind you—of every other crime. He who can lie may kill.

Everything pointed to the conclusion that the young lady—Miss Simpkinson, I supposed she called herself—was perfectly well aware of the strange contents of the box. And this in itself, surely, appeared sufficiently remarkable. So much being admitted, everything became possible.

Still, I could not persuade myself that Miss Simpkinson was the actual murderess. Intuitions and impressions, if rightly controlled (ah, there's the rub!), go a long way towards making a good detective. I had an intuition that Miss Simpkinson would not prove to be the person who had done the deed, although it must remain evident that she was in some manner connected with it. In what manner time must show.

The whole mystery, you will say, was no business of mine. I do not hesitate to admit that. I had no right to inquire into it, and but little opportunity of doing so,

but I felt inexplicably drawn towards it all the same. I could not keep my thoughts off that scene in the custom-house. The thin, old face, with its staring eyes, seemed to look out at me from all the shop windows. Who killed that poor old woman? Why was she killed? I felt that I must occupy myself with the subject, whether I wished to or not.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TWO DUBERTS.

I HAVE said that I had but little opportunity of investigating the matter. To tell the truth, I had just one chance, the merest chance, of finding out something more about it.

Some months ago I had come into contact with a Parisian commissaire de police in the course of my professional duties. My employers always selected me for Continental work, because of my having learnt French thoroughly well in my youth. I had been sent to Paris about a case of breach of confidence, and, finding myself obliged to work together with Monsieur Dubert (that was the commissary's name), I had been enabled to do him a trifling

service. I had not seen him since, but I resolved to call on him now. There was but little possibility of his being able to help me in any way, only you never can know.

I found my police officer in his little office near the Pantheon. That was where his district lay. He was evidently most delighted to see me, though perhaps a little effusive for an Englishman's taste. He knew nothing as yet of what had occurred at the Gare du Nord a couple of hours ago. I told him frankly that I was anxious to follow up the discovery, and added that perhaps the French Government might be able to turn my unexpected presence to account.

And now good luck befriended me. But no, that is saying too much. For surely there was nothing remarkable in the fact that Monsieur Dubert, though he found himself outside the case altogether, should know of brother officers who would natu-

rally be in it. Only, as it happened, the commissary of the quarter directly concerned was, he told me, a relation of his. I don't see that this made much difference in my favor, after all. I forget now whether the man was a brother or a cousin. I fancy he must have been a cousin, but, at all events, the name was the same. My Monsieur Dubert was Léon, and the commissary up at the station was François.

My friend immediately offered to take me up to see his cousin—if cousin it was. He was on duty for half-an-hour longer, during which I had to curb my impatience as best I might, and to amuse myself by observing the numerous little formalities and punctilios of French police service. They are capital policemen, all the same, especially the gendarmes, and the *service de sûreté*.

The half hour came to an end, and Monsieur Dubert locked up his desk. We

got into a cab, and drove the long distance up into the north of the city. And there, in a similar little office, we found Monsieur François.

He knew enough about the discovery, you may be sure. All that evening he had heard of nothing else, spoken of nothing else, thought of nothing else. He was a talkative, excitable little man, not the best material for a police officer, I should have thought. But one is often very much mistaken in judgments of that nature.

On this occasion he was, I believe, more especially excited, on account of the importance and the difficulties of this half-foreign case. Of course he spoke no language but his own—French officials, like our English ones, never do—and the ladies in arrest being foreigners, the box having come from abroad, the whole investigation was complicated with foreign matter. His interpreter, he complained,

had proved inadequate. He was all the more willing to accept of such assistance as I could offer. It turned out to be even less than I had hoped.

He began by telling us exactly how matters stood at this moment. The older lady, it appeared, had not yet recovered consciousness. She was delirious, and had been removed to the infirmary by the advice of the medical man connected with the "Commissariat." The commissaire did not believe that she would prove to be seriously implicated in the case.

The young lady and the maid had undergone a preliminary examination. As for the maid, she evidently knew nothing about the whole matter. As for the young lady, she evidently knew a great deal.

The maid had not been able even to identify the deceased, whom she positively affirmed never to have seen before in her life. From her evidence two points had been made clear, nevertheless.

(1) That the deceased had not been in company of the Simpkinsons during the time immediately preceding the murder, as their maid did not recognize her.

(2) That the black box was Miss Simpkinson's property, for the maid had *identified the box*.

Miss Simpkinson's examination had naturally been of much greater interest. Monsieur François Dubert obligingly showed me his *procès-verbal*. Never mind whether he ought to have done so; he was glad enough to think I could help him in the business.

Miss Simpkinson's behavior certainly was peculiar, and altogether precluded the possibility of her complete innocence. She had answered one-half of the questions put to her, and refused to answer the other half. She had confessed readily enough that her name and her mother's was "Orr-Simpkinson," as indicated on the boxes, and that they had left London on that morning, after having spent the night at a

private hotel.* But when questioned as to her regular place of abode, or her whereabouts on the preceding day, she had suddenly refused to reply. Then she had reconsidered her decision, and subsequently given her accurate address at Tooting, adding that she had come up to the hotel with her mother the day before, so as to be nearer the station in the morning. The maid, on being recalled, had upset this latter statement, in spite of vehement signs from her young mistress, and had informed the commissary that the ladies had been spending the last three weeks together at Southend, and that it was from Southend, and not from Tooting, they had come up to London. It now came out, also, that the maid had not been with them during this time, but had joined them that morning at the station, coming from the Tooting house.

* I may say here, once for all, that I have, of course, substituted other names for the original ones all through this narration. Only the initials have been retained in each case.

This might explain the fact of her recognizing the murdered lady. At any rate—this conclusion seemed certain—Miss Simpkinson knew who the dead woman was, and the maid did not. "And oh, dear, Miss," the maid had said, bursting into tears, "you know as it's the Gospel truth I'm telling, and why don't you send for Mr. Harvey?"

After that the commissary's tone had grown sterner, and Miss Simpkinson's manner yet more refractory. Miss Simpkinson had acknowledged, however, that the box was undoubtedly hers. And the key, she said, was hers also.

A towel had been found in the box. Was the towel hers? "No." Did she know, or believe she knew, whose it might possibly be? She could not say. It was marked with the letters "E. R.;" had she any idea what name those letters could stand for? She refused to answer.

The linen of the deceased had been found to bear the same letters; it was probable,

therefore, that the towel had belonged to her. Could Miss Simpkinson identify the deceased?

"Yes."

I started when I reached this point in the *procès-verbal*, and yet, after all, it was no more than might have been expected. But I started yet more when I read the next two lines.

"Would she do so?"

"No."

It had been impossible to get anything more out of her. Threats and entreaties had alike proved vain. The commissary had closed the preliminary inquiry in despair, and the English young lady had been sent to the Dépôt on the charge of murder of a person unknown.

The commissary's mind was made up on the subject. I have only one charge against Continental criminal procedure, but it is a serious one. It does not give the accused, as it seems to me, a ghost of a chance. Once arrested, he is pronounced guilty.

immediately, and henceforth judges and public prosecutors have but one object—to bully or cheat him into confessing his crime. I have often heard intelligent foreigners—my Monsieur Dubert for one—admit this fact and deplore it.

On this occasion, however, Léon Dubert joined with his cousin in suspecting Miss Simpkinson. It only remained to be seen in how far she had accomplices, or was herself, perhaps, but an accessory, for there could not be the slightest doubt, they were agreed, that she was very seriously implicated. I admitted they were right. They summed up all the items against her, and they certainly made out a very heavy bill. She had been aware from the very first of the horrible contents of the box, which, for some reason or other, she was piloting out of the kingdom. Why had she traveled with it? Probably to bring the dead body where it could be buried or abandoned with less fear of recognition. She had evidently trusted to chance, the abundance

of her luggage, her own powers of persuasion, the cord, the lost key—to all these things together, in her hope of avoiding attention, and it was only by a combination of fatalities, and the ungracious obstinacy of the officials, that her plan had been frustrated. So much was plain to the Frenchmen as well as to myself.

It was furthermore certain that she knew about the murder, and that the name of the victim was also no secret to her. She had striven to mislead M. Dubert altogether with regard to her stay in Southend. She had admitted that the box in which the body was found was hers—her maid had proved that besides,—and she had refused any information with regard to the towel it contained.

The maid, by-the-bye, had also been questioned about this towel, and from her evidence it had become certain that it did not belong, and could not have belonged, to Mrs. Simpkinson's linen stores. My first impression had been that the letters

might have been added to purposely confuse, but this was, of course, removed when I learned from M. François Dubert that the murdered woman's linen was marked in the same manner. The towel had belonged to her.

CHAPTER V.

THE LUGGAGE-LABELS.

"So much is undeniable," said Léon Dubert, as we sat talking over the affair in the commissary's bureau; "the young lady has the whole secret in her keeping. More than that, it is probably by her, or at her instigation, that the deed was done."

"Undoubtedly," I answered; "but you will find, mark me, that she is not alone."

"Probably," said Léon.

"And even, believe me, you will find that she is not number one."

"Why?" queried François in surprise.

"I do not know. I may be mistaken, but that is what I believe."

"I will tell you why," interposed Léon laughing. "She is young; she is a com-

patriot; she is pretty. Is she not pretty? *Enfin*, she is interesting—and a murderess? Fie! It is too villainous. So there must be a number one. Beware, my friend, of pretty women in a police-court."

I laughed too, but I only nodded my head, and asked whether we could not see the box and the corpse.

As it happened, this was still possible. The body would be removed to the Morgue early next morning, but it had been decided to leave it for the night at the police-station. François Dubert took his cousin and me into an adjoining room.

This room was bare, but for a large table,—a plain wooden board on trestles,—a long bench, and a great white stove. It had no other exit than through the commissary's office. It was used as a rule, I believe, for such witnesses as he might order to be brought before him.

On the long, narrow table the dead body was laid out, just as it had been removed from the box. I examined it closely. It

was the body of a female, apparently belonging to the upper middle-class—a lady undoubtedly, though rather a prim and old-fashioned looking one. The age was, as nearly as I could establish it, between sixty and sixty-five. The deceased was dressed in a long, plain, black gown, made of handsome woollen stuff, but entirely untrimmed, and wore neat cuffs and a tight-fitting collar. She had on a black lace cap, fastened with jet-headed pins to her grey hair, which lay in smooth bands over a lofty forehead. The expression of the pinched, parchmenty face was not an amiable one, even in death. There was a hard and stinging look in the staring, light-blue eyes, and an obstinate twist about the thin lips.

"Une méchante vieille," said Léon.

I thought it was more than probable.

She still wore her watch—a plain, ten-guinea, keyless Bennett, fastened by a black guard. I looked at it, and took the number.

"That will go a long way towards identifying her," I said, "if nothing else turns up."

There was also a purse in her pocket, marked "Parkins and Gotto," and containing some loose silver, and three sovereigns in gold in a separate compartment. Furthermore, the pocket contained a fine cambric handkerchief marked "E. R.," like all the rest of the old lady's exquisite linen.

Robbery had evidently not been the motive of the crime. I never had thought it would prove to be, from the very first.

I lifted up the head and removed the cap. On pushing back the thin hair, I found a great, dull, bloodless bruise, high up over the left temple. I asked François whether he had noticed it. He said, "No; the examination of the body would take place to-morrow at the Morgue."

It was evident that the deceased had been stunned by a blow; but such a blow

could hardly have been sufficient to cause instantaneous death.

It appeared far more probable that chloroform would prove to be the cause of death, if no symptoms of poisoning were found at the examination.

Could a woman have struck the blow? I examined the bruise again. It was difficult, of course, to say for certain, but it looked as if great force must have been used in striking.

On the whole, I did not think it likely a woman would have proceeded in this manner. The chloroform looked like feminine work, but hardly the blow.

I asked in vain for permission to undress the body. M. François would not allow any one to do that till the experts had seen it. Of course he was quite right.

I next asked, and obtained, permission carefully to examine the box. I did so most minutely, but with indifferent success. It was a plain, oblong box, made of some stout wood, and painted black outside—a

rough, unvarnished black. The lid opened on brass hinges, and the inside was lined with a common pink-striped paper. Against the lid was a square placard with the makers' name, Browne & Elder, 117 Cheapside—a noted London firm, I believe.

There was nothing at all inside the box but the cord which had been round it, and which the commissary had placed where it now lay. The box appeared new, and no stains of blood or anything else could be perceived on the paper. There were only dents in it, and one or two slight abrasions where the limbs had been forced down. Nothing could be learnt from the inside.

At first sight nothing could be learnt from the outside either. It was destined, however, to furnish an important clue.

It was not lettered in any way. I asked François Dubert whether it had not had a passenger-label. He told me no; and that this was the more remarkable because all the other articles of luggage, without exception, showed the label I had noticed

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at the station, "Mrs. Orr-Simpkinson, passenger from London to Paris." I looked at him earnestly. "Make a note of that, monsieur," I said.

Miss Simpkinson, however, had easily accounted for this fact. The luggage-labels they used, she said, were made to tie on, and, at the last moment, it had been noticed that the box had no straps or other fastenings to which anything could be attached. It was stupidly made, as far as that went. The maid unexpectedly corroborated this explanation.

When I say there were no labels, I mean there were no such labels as passengers affix for themselves. There were, of course, the company's registered-luggage-papers, such as are used for luggage going abroad. On the top of the box was a big capital "P," on a white ground, signifying, I presume, "Paris," or perhaps "passenger's," and intended for the convenience of the custom-house officers, and on the front side of the

box was a smaller paper of a pale green color, marked as follows :—

Via Calais.	LONDON (CHARING CROSS) /	Via Calais.
	212	
	PARIS.	

Not very hopeful this. Otherwise, the sides of the box were perfectly black and smooth. I lifted it up and looked underneath. It was perfectly smooth and black there too.

I may remark here that a locksmith had been called in, and that he had declared, after examination, that the key M' Simpson had produced was not intended for the lock, and could never, by any possibility, have been used either to open or shut it. Miss Simpkinson, on hearing this, merely affirmed that the man lied.

I stood looking at the box for some time.

"You could tell us the mystery," I said in my mind, "if you could but speak. What

are you hiding? Who thrust that wretched woman down into you, and then shut your lid upon his crime? Was she dead, or still half-alive, when you received her? You *shall* speak," I went on excitedly. I was fevered with the idea that some help must be obtainable from the box itself in this horrible search.

Suddenly an idea struck me. I suggested to Monsieur Dubert that he should carefully loosen the labels and see whether, by any chance, another might be hidden underneath. He shrugged his shoulders. I believe he hardly dared to touch the box.

"It is the merest possibility," I admitted, "but—look here, after all, the case is in your hands. What a famous thing it would be for you if you could find out something of importance before it passes to the *juge d'instruction*, as it will in a day or two. You are perfectly entitled to do this, are you not?"

"Oh, yes," he said, "I am perfectly entitled."

"Well then, hurry up. I have an idea it will be worth our while."

He consented, rather unwillingly. We took the "London to Paris" label first, and began slowly loosening it in the orthodox manner. It is always a long job, that, requiring careful handling. At last, however, the paper came peeling off, and revealed the smooth black surface of the box.

This was a disappointment, but I induced my two Frenchmen to begin with fresh energy on the other label, the big "P" on a white slip. And this time we were rewarded, if you can call so small a result a reward. There was another paper under the white one. I held my breath as it slowly came into view. It stood revealed in another moment. After all, there was very little on it. Only the three words in large printed letters, "Greenwich to South-end." Nothing else. It was a common

label, such as the porters affix at railway stations.

Nothing else? I turned the box fully towards the light of the flaring gas-lamp, and, as I held it there, close before my eyes, staring at it, as if I would draw the secret out of this little paper that had so unexpectedly come to light, I suddenly noticed two small pencilled letters in one corner of it, half effaced by the gum, or paste, of the label which had covered them. They were the letters "P. H.." in handwriting.

I put down the box, half dizzy, I knew not why.

"This box came from Southend," I said, as calmly as I could.

"Yes," replied Léon, "that agrees with what the maid told us."

I tilted up the box once more, almost mechanically, and, while continuing to talk in a desultory manner about the crime, I strove to photograph those two faint letters on to my brain. I hardly knew why I was

so fascinated by them, but I felt that I here held in my hand what would turn out to be, at some future period, the free end of a tangled skein.

My surmise proved correct. From the beginning to the end, the story of the discovery of the murder hinged on those two letters.

I was in a hurry to get home and retrace them on paper before the recollection of them grew faint. I bade the two French police-officers a hurried farewell.

"And if you will accept of a bit of advice," I said, in passing out, "don't let anybody or anything touch or rub that label in any way whatsoever. It's the starting point."

The Frenchmen looked bewildered. From that time we worked on separate lines. The foreign authorities did their best, but they had great difficulties to contend with, and they were not very successful in discovering the Black-Box Murderer.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MYSTERIOUS INITIALS.

As soon as I got safely into my own room, I sat down and copied the two letters I had seen in a corner of the luggage-label exactly on a sheet of paper. I reproduce them here.



Let the reader take note of them as closely as I did, if he can.

Then I sat down to recapitulate what I knew of the incidents of the crime, and I found that I knew a great deal.

Murder—presumably by a blow and subsequent chloroform—on a lady named

"E. R."; time, apparently yesterday evening; place, Southend; accomplice—if not actual perpetrator—in charge; name, Edith Orr-Simpkinson.

I had not the slightest doubt, from Miss Simpkinson's prevarications, in addition to the discovery of the second label, that the place of the murder was Southend. I could only not account for the absence of some indication that the box had travelled up from Southend to London, as it must have done, before it could start for the Continent from Charing Cross.

The first thing now was to find out the name of the murdered lady, and that surely could not be a matter of great difficulty for the police authorities, if they would only have the sense to inquire at Southend, and not at Tooting. The next thing would be to explain the mystery of the key.

Was Miss Simpkinson speaking in good faith when she repeatedly affirmed that the key she had in her possession was that of the black box?

She had certainly proved that she was capable of gross untruthfulness, but there was a tone of especial candor about her statements with regard to this matter.

If she lied about the key, she was a consummate mistress of the art of lying.

I could not quite believe her that. She had too honest and energetic a manner about her.

But if she was truthfully mistaken about the key, then—it seems the natural conclusion—she might be mistaken about the box.

But how could she be that? Her maid had identified it, and besides, she was acquainted, as he had seen, with the contents. On the other hand, this box had been the only one among all her luggage that was not labelled, and her explanation of that discrepancy seemed hardly satisfactory.

I was very much confused and put out. I could not maintain the theory that the box might not be Miss Simpkinson's.

Pleasantly as it fitted into my plan, it was too evidently irrational. And, yet, I was puzzled about the key and the broken lock, and those letters, P. H. In vain I told myself that those letters meant nothing at all, and had simply been pencilled there by some porter or other for reasons of his own. I had just half convinced myself of the plausibility of this suggestion, and was dozing off to sleep, when there flashed across my brain the exclamation of the maid which I had read in Monsieur Dubert's *procès-verbal*,—

“Why don't you send for Mr. Harvey?”

“H—Harvey. The merest coincidence, undoubtedly. Still—Harvey, Harvey. P. H. Paul Harvey. Peter Harvey. Who was this Mr. Harvey?”

An intimate friend, evidently.

After this, there was no more chance of sleep for me that night.

CHAPTER VII.

AUSTIN.

NEXT morning my young lovers occupied my attention. They provokingly started for Fontainebleau, and, still more provokingly, were charmed with the place when they got there, and looked for rooms. Fortunately they could find nothing to their liking, and so came back to Paris again. Besides, as I heard the fond young creature say, they would be safer in the city, and less likely to be traced. I wished she had thought of that before.

It was six o'clock and more by the time I got to my room again. My young people went to the Châtelet to amuse themselves with fairy scenes, and I hurriedly dined at a Duval, and then

started for Léon Dubert's bureau. I was burning to find out what progress had been made in the murder case. I had not been able to banish it from my thoughts all day.

Léon Dubert knew nothing fresh about the matter, and passed me on to his cousin at once. He was hard at work on a robbery of his own, so I drove straight to François' commissariat.

I found François very much troubled in his mind, and very nervous and impatient. The Scotland Yard authorities had been telegraphed to, and they were sending over one of their men. In the meantime, nothing of importance had transpired. It was still impossible to examine Mrs. Simpson, and nothing new could be got out of the daughter, who would not speak, or the maid, who had but little to say. Mother and daughter had been released from the Dépôt, and allowed to take up their abode in a house close by, which was, in fact, a dependence of the prison, kept by

a woman, who looked after the prisoners, and remained responsible for their not leaving their rooms. It bore the stately title of a "*Pension pour Familles*," and charged the prices of a first-class hotel.

I was anxious to forestall the London detective, and to get hold of a clue before he arrived. During the whole day I had allowed my mind to dwell on the circumstances of the case,—I could not help it,—and the more I had thought of them, the more firmly the conviction had fastened itself upon my brain that Miss Simpkinson was less guilty than appearances made her out to be. I had certainly not much cause for this belief. Perhaps Léon was right, and I should have been less interested in the young lady if she had been older and uglier than she was.

I asked François whether I could not obtain permission to see her. I had been contemplating that step all day. I foresaw that it would be productive of complications, but the very daring of it made it

attractive. Probably François would seriously object. He hesitated. I urged that I might be able—as a compatriot—to get information from the prisoner which she would withhold from him. “Was no one admitted to her?” I asked.

“Ye-es,” he said slowly—“ye-es, one or two people, with an order. It is not altogether forbidden.”

“Could you take me?”

“I could; but——”

“Let us go at once, then. The more you have found out before the London detectives come, the more creditable to you.”

Well, he allowed himself to be persuaded, and we started. A *fiacre* took us to a gloomy house in a narrow street. I have forgotten the name of the street, but the back part of the house looked out on, and was protected by, the prison. It was an ill-lighted, melancholy place, and at that early hour—half-past eight—there were already few passers-by, and many closed

shutters. We drove up to a heavy door, with a bright gas lamp over it, and Monsieur François rang the bell. It was answered immediately by the mistress of the house, who led us into a sort of parlor. She was a big, plump, greasy-looking woman, with a loud voice, and black ringlets. Monsieur Dubert called her Madame Bassequin. The parlor was an uninviting apartment, with green velvet furniture, and two vases of imitation flowers under glass shades. It had two gas lights, one without a globe.

The commissaire left after a few whispered words of introduction. Madame Bassequin went into an adjoining room, informing me, as she went, that it was "*pour prévenir ces dames.*"

I could hear voices in this back room, which communicated with the one I was in by folding doors—evidently arranged so as to facilitate careful supervision of the guests madame so kindly received at times. One of the voices was Miss Simpkinson's; the

other was a man's—full, pleasant, sympathetic—an English voice. They were speaking English. This rather disconcerted me. I had hoped to be alone in the field. Miss Simpkinson had an Englishman with her. Who could that Englishman be?

I had sent in my card after penciling on it,—

“A compatriot who believes he can be of great service.”

I had perhaps not much right to hazard this supposition, but one pretext was as well as another. And I was of service after all, in the end, so it was a good thing, notwithstanding, that Dubert allowed me to go.

The voices in the next room were discussing the propriety of admitting me. “Let me see him,” I heard the man say, and I was glad to hear the woman reply with firmness, “We may as well receive him together.” I pressed close to the folding doors to hear more, but at that moment the mistress of the mansion returned.

With one bound I was in the middle of the room, but not quickly enough. Madame Bassequin arched her eyebrows in a knowing manner, and smiled an evil little smile. "I see you are of the *métier*," she said; "it is no use for me. They always speak English. I have demanded a man who understands the language, but he will be gone before he comes." With this last enigmatical sentence madame seemed well pleased. She repeated it to herself as we walked down the passage. Then she opened the door, and ushered me in.

The room was a fair-sized one, but uncomfortably furnished and dirty-looking. It cost the occupants, as Léon subsequently informed me, twenty-five francs per diem, and really, I think, for that price the antimacassars might have been washed. There were three arms to the chandelier in this apartment (for gas was a handsome extra), so that every stain and cobweb seemed to stand out in the brilliant light; and there was a big fire in the French grate, built up

to consume the largest possible quantity of wood. The room was very hot in consequence.

Miss Orr-Simpkinson sat on an old horse-hair sofa in the far corner, between the windows and the fireplace, and a gentleman stood by her side. The gas-lamps shone full in their faces. They were looking towards me with some surprise.

I, on my side, took them in at a glance. At least I thought I did so. I liked the look of Miss Simpkinson all the more, now that I could examine her at my ease. She was still dressed in her dark, close-fitting traveling dress. Their luggage had been sequestered, and the police only allowed her to have the most indispensable articles. But she looked neat, and compact, and energetic in the simple attire, with her beautiful black hair coiled closely round her head. She had great, dark, expressive eyes, which looked at you with a straight, strong look, and atoned for the irregularity of her features. She was not by any means

handsome, strictly speaking, but she was as handsome as a commanding figure and fine eyes must always make a woman. I said to myself once more; I don't believe she's the kind of woman to commit a murder; but she's the kind of woman who would kill herself to defend the murderer—if she loved him.

If I liked the look of Miss Simpkinson, I felt still more attracted, I must confess, by the gentleman who stood at her side. He wore the dress of a clergyman of the Established Church, and it greatly became him. He was a tall, slenderly-built man, with a young, close-shaven, fresh-colored face, a head of yellow hair, cropped short, and bright, honest, blue eyes, that had a child-like candor in them. He rested his hand on the back of Miss Simpkinson's sofa, and I was glad to find her in such agreeable company, and so well protected.

"Lovers," I said to myself, "no doubt. It must be her brother she's shielding."

I must say, in my own self-defence, that

I was angry with myself at the time for the obstinacy with which I stuck to my preconceived assumptions, in spite of conflicting appearances.

We were alone. I had motioned Madame Bassequin away. Miss Simpkinson began speaking, with a self-possession remarkable in one so young. She cannot have been more than twenty, and her companion, I should say, may have been twenty-three.

"May I know," said Miss Simpkinson, "what is the object of this visit, Mr."—she looked at the card I had sent in—"Spence?"

She turned her fine eyes to me interrogatively.

"Certainly, madame," I said, not without a little awkwardness. "My name is Spence, of —'s private Inquiry Office, as you can see by the card. I happened to be present yesterday at—at the station. I thought that, perhaps, under the circumstances, you might be requiring such ser-

vices as our office is in the habit of rendering. I speak French fluently, and am acquainted with some of the authorities engaged in this investigation."

Miss Simpkinson did not answer. The clergyman began speaking for her. He had a musical voice and a pleasant manner, and I liked him all the more.

"We may find your services valuable," he said. "At the present moment, in this terrible sorrow and confusion, we hardly know what to do or think. We can give no explanation of what has happened. If you can furnish us with one, we shall owe you a debt beyond all repayment."

"May I know," I said, "in how far you, sir, are interested or concerned in the matter?"

"Certainly," he replied. "I am Mr. Harvey,—the Rev. Mr. Harvey,—and I am engaged to be married to this young lady, Miss Orr-Simpkinson."

Mr. Harvey! I looked at the honest English gentleman before me, and felt that

my cardboard edifice was crumbling to the ground.

"I think, Edith," said Mr. Harvey, turning to his engaged, "that perhaps the wisest thing we can do is to take this gentleman into our confidence, whilst awaiting further advice."

"Yes, Austin," said Miss Simpkinson.

Austin Harvey! This, then, was the P. H. of all my wonderful combinations! Austin is a very pretty name. I called myself "fool," and "blockhead," under my breath; and, I believe, could I have done so with decency, I should have got up and left the house and the case at that moment. At any rate, I must start on a fresh track.

"The charge against Miss Simpkinson and her mother is a preposterous one," continued Mr. Harvey, addressing himself to me, "and yet we must admit that we are the victims of most extraordinary circumstances. When I was telegraphed for last night, I did not know what to expect.

I certainly had not expected this. And now I know neither what to expect nor what to believe."

"The ladies have been arrested," I said, "with nothing more or less than a corpse in their possession. That corpse was hidden in a black box. The first question is, 'Was the box Miss Simpkinson's?'"

"Yes," said Miss Simpkinson quickly—too quickly, I thought.

"My dear Edith—" began the gentleman.

She stopped him with an imperious gesture.

"I tell you the box is mine, Austin. Ask Susan. It is not the slightest use your reopening the discussion. Whose could it be else?"

"Whose, indeed?" said Mr. Harvey, with an amusingly puzzled look.

"The second question then is," I continued, "'Who is the murdered person?' Up till now the corpse has not been identified."

"That question I can answer," said Mr. Harvey, a sad look overshadowing his pleasant face. "I wish I could not. Miss Simpkinson could have answered it also, and I think, was unwise in not at once giving the French authorities all desired information. Yes, Edith, that is another subject on which I must regretfully continue to differ with you."

"But who *is* it?" I cried impatiently.

"From what Miss Simpkinson tells me, there cannot be the slightest doubt that the body is that of an aunt of mine," answered the clergyman, walking up and down the room so as the better to conceal his emotion; "and, painful as the subject naturally is, I shall tell the police whatsoever they have a right to know."

Miss Simpkinson rose up and came forward.

"For Heaven's sake!" she cried passionately, "have mercy on us all and hold your peace."

"Edith," said the young clergyman, very softly and tenderly, as he drew her arm through his, "you are wrong, dearest, you are wrong. There are moments in our lives when we hesitate, but usually we know only too clearly where the path of duty lies. I must speak, dearest. And besides, be sure of this, if I did not, others would."

He looked towards me.

"How long do you calculate the French police will take to find out without my help?" he said.

"They know the old lady's initials," I answered, "and her probable place of abode, and the number and maker of her watch, and they have her clothes and purse—three days, I should say."

"I can spare them the delay. My aunt's name was Miss Elizabeth Raynell. She was unmarried, and resided at No. 13 Upper Norton Crescent, Haverstock Hill. She had recently been staying at Southend for the benefit of her health, and it must

have been there"—his voice faltered slightly—"that she met her death."

Miss Simpkinson dropped back on the sofa, and hid her face in her hands.

"I think you are right, sir," I remarked, "if you will excuse my saying so, to help the police as much as is in your power. It is no use keeping back facts which must come to light sooner or later, and such action can only make worse what is already—excuse my saying so—a very awkward predicament."

I was angry with Miss Simpkinson for her unreasonable behavior.

She took her hands from her face.

"I know it," she said.

"The murder was committed at South-end," I went on; "I knew that before I came here. Why was it committed?"

There was a dead silence. The two lovers looked uneasily at each other.

"What right have you to question us?" said Miss Simpkinson fiercely.

I rose at once.

"None," I replied; "nor any wish to do so. Only I thought you might be wishing to employ me. There's murder, Miss, and some one'll have to be punished for it. I'd as lief as any one it shouldn't be you."

"Punished!" cried the clergyman—"murder—great heavens, Edith!"

We stood gazing at each other, all three—he distressed, she defiant, I doubtful.

"Edith, Edith," he repeated, "you are beside yourself, poor darling. Ask what you will, sir, and help us what you can. We must let our own consciences be judges in how far we can answer. But we cannot tell you who did the murder, for we do not know, and we dare not tell you why we think it may perhaps have been done."

"Did you live with your aunt?" I asked.

"No," he answered; "I am curate of St. Mary the Virgin's, at Southend. It was chiefly on account of my living there that my aunt chose Southend, when her doctors recommended sea air."

"Did she live alone?"

"Yes, with two servants—an old woman and a young girl."

"They were not with her at the time?"

"No; she had left them in London. She was staying in lodgings."

"And what was her address at South-end?"

"Do not tell him," interposed Miss Simpkinson.

"My dear Edith! No. 17 Marine Parade."

I noted the address down in my pocket-book. Miss Simpkinson watched me uneasily. I could not understand her.

"Do you want the guilty person to be found out, ma'am?" I asked.

"No," she said.

"Do you want to take his—or her—place?"

She did not answer. I saw that I should not get much out of her. A sudden idea struck me. I resolved, before I left, to find out about the box.

"Excuse my asking," I said; "you live in Greenwich, do you not?"

"No," she replied shortly; "Tooting. The police have my address."

"I beg your pardon," I said, "I thought it was Greenwich. Greenwich is a very pretty place, and pleasant to live in."

"It may be so," replied Miss Simpkinson. "I do not know. I have never been there."

That was all I wanted to know. I had not expected to gain the information so easily.

"At any rate," I went on, "the box with the body left Charing Cross yesterday morning. I do not deny that the box is yours, as you recognize it. Do you mean to say that you placed the body of the murdered woman in it?"

She grew white at last.—to the very lips,—but she spoke in a firm voice.

"No," she answered; "I do not say that."

"Then do you mean to declare that you were present when another person did so?"

"I do not."

"Then, if the box is yours, some one must have had access to it without your knowledge."

"No. Since I bought the box, only four or five days ago, it has always stood in my room. My maid packed it yesterday morning. Ask her."

I said to myself, "She is prevaricating. She is telling only half the truth. If her maid packed the box, it must have been yesterday morning, as she says, but then it was in the London hotel, for at South-end the maid was not with her. It is impossible to find out, as yet, which is the truth and which is not. But her very falsehood will betray her."

"You do not believe me?" she said. "No matter. But I will swear that my box never left my room. How the body of poor Miss Raynell was ever placed in it, and by whom, the police must find out."

She cast a defiant look at her lover.

"They will find out," I said quietly.

My presence there was becoming useless, and even ridiculous. I walked towards the door.

"That box is not your box, Miss Simpson," I said, as I passed out.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE "TWIN-BOX" THEORY.

THAT parting thrust was, perhaps, a stupid and an unkind one, but it was a bit of revenge for all the young lady's contrariness. Under a charge of murder—forsooth! A girl of twenty, belonging to genteel society, and as cool as a cucumber, and as cross as a Good-Friday bun. It was too bad. I could forgive her as long as I thought that some love affair might be mixed up in the business; but now even that extenuation seemed altogether out of the question. I had no patience with her. She deserves to be hanged, I said to myself. Not that I meant it.

I had made quite sure about the box before I spoke. The black box, at present at the French police-station, had traveled

from Greenwich to Southend—of that there could be no doubt; the label I had discovered under the Paris one proved it. And if Miss Simpkinson had never been at Greenwich, and if the box, bought only four or five days ago, had never left Miss Simpkinson's room, then Miss Simpkinson's box could not be the Paris one. Miss Simpkinson had betrayed this to me herself.

But the maid had identified it. For this there could only be one explanation. There must be two boxes exactly similar, one belonging to Miss Simpkinson, one the property of a person as yet unknown, and these two boxes must have been interchanged. But if so, Miss Simpkinson must have been privy to the transaction. Her manner showed that she knew about the second box and its owner, and it led one to infer that she knew about its contents before the box was opened.

If so, this girl was the daring accomplice of a dangerous criminal.

I could not believe it of the woman who had gained the affections of so charming and straightforward a man as Austin Harvey. But I could only repeat that she certainly was a liar, and she might be a good deal more; and I pitied the young clergyman from the bottom of my heart.

I could now account for the difficulty about the keys. After careful thought, I came to the conclusion that Miss Simpkinson had not known about the exchange of boxes till the examination took place at the custom-house. Her anxiety not to have the cord unfastened I explained away as only natural; the expression "likely to create suspicion," I considered to have been used in a general way—"unwarranted suspicion" being meant. On the other hand, when the box was opened, she must, undoubtedly, have at once seized the situation, and understood its import. At that moment she must have recognized the guilty person, and resolved to shield

him; and most probably she must have understood the method of the crime.

The murder had been committed by some near connection of the old lady's and of Mr. Harvey's—probably by a relation. Both the young clergyman and Miss Simpkinson were anxious to shield him—he as far as conscience and honor would allow, she a good deal further. The difference lay in their respective characters. What she was doing she was doubtless doing for her lover's sake.

I was puzzled still, but not ill-content. My visit had been more useful to me than I could have expected. It was irregular, if you like, and venturesome. So much the better in my profession. The difficulty about the keys was now explained. The boxes were similar, supplied by the same firm. The locks were different.

The absence of the address-label would thus also be accounted for.

But the absence of a label indicating the

journey from Southend to London remained unexplained.

The box had been at Southend. It had arrived there from Greenwich. Miss Simpkinson's box had also been at Southend. It had arrived there probably from Tooting, or from the makers. When had they been exchanged? And where? How had the box with the corpse come up to Charing Cross? If Miss Raynell had been murdered at Southend the night before the Simpkinsons started for the Continent, and if the Simpkinsons had spent that night at a London hotel, how could Miss Simpkinson be implicated in the crime?

The first thing to be done next was to find out the original possessor of the Paris black box.

CHAPTER IX.

AUSTIN'S VISIT.

I was sitting in my room next morning, writing out my report for my employers, when Mr. Harvey was announced. He looked troubled and careworn, as if after a sleepless night, and no wonder. We came to business at once.

"I have been thinking over your visit last night," he said frankly, "and I feel that we owe you an apology. Miss Simpkinson's manner must seem strange to you, and even incomprehensible."

He hesitated.

"It does not seem so strange to me as you might think," I answered quietly; "I am accustomed, you must remember, to similar investigations."

He looked a little disconcerted, but recovered himself immediately.

"You came away, then," he said, "with a definite impression. Would it be asking too much to inquire of you what that impression is?"

"It is asking a good deal," I said, "and, in fact, it is hardly fair; for you summon me to surrender what little advantage I may have gained, and you give me nothing in return."

"That is true," replied Mr. Harvey. "Well, if you communicate your impression to me, I will undertake honestly to tell you whether it is a correct one."

"Which is the correct one?"

"Oh, no," he said quickly; "whether yours is the correct one. Yes, or no?"

He looked straight into my eyes with an honest, appealing smile. I have never met a man with a more winning manner, and I felt my interest in Miss Simpkinson decreasing the more I was taken with sympathy for her unfortunate lover.

"To my mind, there remains no doubt," I said slowly, "that there are two similar black boxes, and that both Miss Simpkinson and yourself are perfectly well aware that the one now in the possession of the Paris police is not hers. At the same time, however, you both know who is the owner of this box which contained the corpse, and your one fear is that he should prove to be the murderer."

Austin Harvey flushed up. I had spoken carefully, watching him all the time. In the hot changes on his fresh, young face, I read the corroboration of my theory. I was right so far.

"You know a good deal," he said, with a catch in his usually clear voice.

"Is my supposition not correct?"

"It is absolutely correct."

A few moments of silence followed. Mr. Harvey sat back in his chair, gazing into his clerical wide-awake. I watched him with a question hovering on my lips. He

was honest, ingenuous, anxious to do right. Why not chance it?

"Who is the owner of the black box?" I said suddenly.

I repented of my indiscretion immediately. The tall figure began to tremble from head to foot. The face twitched nervously, and the eyes grew hazy. He mastered himself with a visible effort.

"Shall I speak?" he said to himself.

I felt the words more than I heard them.

He got up and went to the window, and stood looking out on the busy boulevard. I understood, weeks afterwards, what thoughts must have agitated him at that moment. At last he spoke, in a toneless voice.

"No," he said. "Duty cannot require me to answer that question. I am doing right to refuse."

He came back to me and assumed a more natural manner.

"You must distinguish," he said, "neither Miss Simpkinson nor I can be said to know anything with regard to the murder. We both only suspect. If I knew, I should consider it my duty to give all possible information to the Paris police at whatever cost." He repeated these words mournfully. "But we only suspect ; and the one prayer and expectation of our hearts is that our suspicion may prove to be false. Matters standing thus, I have resolved to tell all I know and have known, but not all I have thought or still think. I believe it is a distinction I can fully reconcile with my conscience ; for it must be my duty in no way to retard the march of justice ; but it is no less my duty in this case not knowingly to accelerate it, especially where—for all I know—justice may be wandering astray."

"Miss Simpkinson," I said, "goes farther."

"Miss Simpkinson must be judge of her own actions in the matter," answered Mr.

Harvey ; "and we must make full allowance for the utter confusion of mind into which such events as those of the last twenty-four hours would naturally have thrown any young lady. She is not able, as yet, to think or speak coherently."

"You must permit me to differ from you there," said I ; "she is quite able, more or less coherently, to delude the authorities by incorrect statements, and so the French police have found. If you are permitted to see her again, you had better advise her to be careful."

"You do not mean to imply," cried the clergyman, "that Miss Simpkinson is in danger of any serious annoyance from the police?"

"She is in danger of a good deal more," I said grimly.

"Good heavens, it is maddening!" exclaimed Austin Harvey. "Heaven help us, what are we to do? I cannot believe," he went on, "that this whole miserable business will injure Miss Simpkinson in

any way. The idea is agony to me. I assure you, by all I hold most sacred, she is utterly innocent."

"I do not deny it," I replied; "but, if so, she is rapidly making an accomplice of herself, and accomplices are not innocent."

Poor fellow! Till now he had kept up fairly well, but he was evidently terribly cut up at the idea of any harm befalling his sweetheart.

"What," he said—"what would you have her to do?"

"Let her do as you are doing," I answered roughly. "No falsehoods, no suppositions, and plain answers where a plain answer is due."

He clasped my hand.

"That is right," he said earnestly. "We will pull her out of this. I will go to her at once and tell her what you say. Nonsense; they must admit her innocence soon, and you must help me to prove it. It is for that object I came here. I wish you to investigate this case on my behalf, keeping



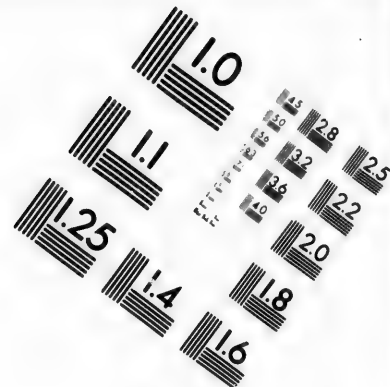
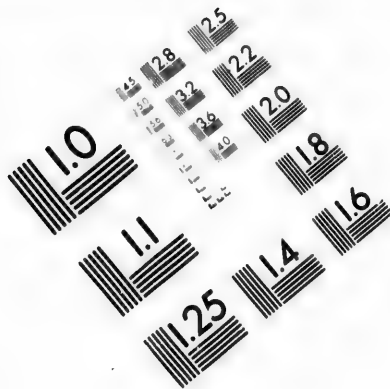
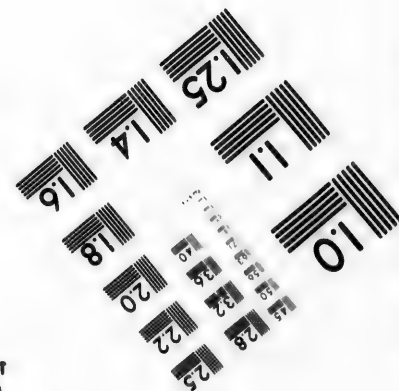
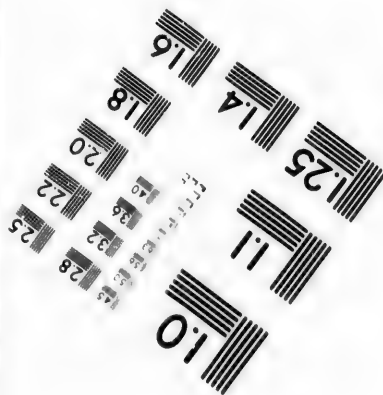
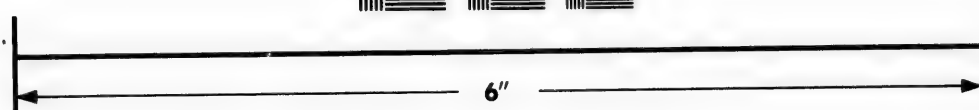
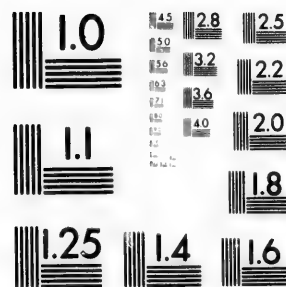


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an eye on the police. You must find out what they find out—and more, if you can. We must learn who did the deed. You will communicate all you discover, or think you discover, to me, and I only hope that your investigations will give my suspicions the lie."

"Do I understand, sir," I said, "that you retain me professionally in this case? If that is so, I must communicate with my employers."

"Do so without loss of time."

"I am not free at this moment, but any other man can take my place here. In a case of such importance as this—" I bowed, without finishing my sentence. Austin then took up his hat. He fingered it a little awkwardly.

"There is one more thing I should like to ask you before leaving," he said, with some hesitation; "I am a poor man, and perhaps it would be wiser to understand before beginning——"

"The terms," I interrupted promptly. (I always cut this subject short.) "Employers will forward prospectus. Will be found very reasonable, I do not doubt, sir," and I bowed him out.

He passed on to the landing, and I followed him. He went downstairs very slowly, like a man in deep thought. I stood watching him at the top of the staircase. At a turn of the stairs he slackened his pace still more, and, half mechanically, as it seemed to me, drew a white pocket-handkerchief out of his breast-coat-pocket and passed it softly over his eyes. As he drew this handkerchief from his overcoat, a grey envelope came with it, and fell to the ground with a faint thud. I heard the slight noise where I stood—a dozen steps higher up,—but the clergyman did not seem to notice it. He went on slowly descending the stairs.

I checked a first impulse to call after him, and held my breath. A letter! Who

knows what it might tell! I stood watching—waiting.

Mr. Harvey did not turn.

I covered the precious grey scrap with my eyes, gloating over it as if I could attract it towards me, or hide it from sight. Supposing he were to miss it?

How plain it showed against the crimson hotel carpet! Supposing some one were to come running upstairs and call out! A waiter, for instance! All this in the flash of the moment! I dared not move towards it, lest the movement should make him turn his head.

He put his hand to his breast-pocket, and I gave myself up for lost. But it was only to arrange his handkerchief.

He turned the corner into the vestibule, and at that same moment I was down, with my hand over the prize—like a vulture, at one fell swoop.

I rushed up to my room and locked myself in. I laid down the envelope on the table. It was a square envelope, of grey-

tinted paper, sent by post from Dover, and addressed to the Revd. Austin Harvey, at the Hotel de la Paix, Paris.

Would it prove to be an empty envelope, or did it contain the letter still?

By the feel of the thing, it was not empty. I turned it round, and, with trembling fingers, touched a paper inside. This paper would put me on the right track. I had somehow believed that from the first.

I drew it out and unfolded it. The letter began, "My dear Austin." I turned hastily to the signature over the page, and read "Philip."

I had barely found time to glance over the contents when an impatient knock came to my door. I hurriedly flung the letter into a drawer and locked it. Then I threw off my coat as a suitable pretext for having the door locked, and went in my shirt-sleeves to see who was there.

It was Mr. Harvey come back. He pushed me into the room and entered it

with me, before I knew what he was doing. His look and manner betrayed extreme agitation. "I dropped a letter just now," he said; "I must have it back again."

"Well?" I said quietly.

"I must have it back again, I tell you. I am convinced I dropped it on the stairs. You were standing on the landing. You must have seen me drop it."

"I sha'n't tell any lies about it," I said; "I did."

"And you have got it?"

"I have."

"That's all right. Then let me have it back, immediately. Sorry to have troubled you."

"That's a different story," I said; "I fear I can't let you have that letter back again, Mr. Harvey."

"Can't let me have it back again? What do you mean? Why not?"

"I must reserve it, sir, as evidence."

"Nonsense; you have no right to touch

it. It is private correspondence. It lies beyond your competence altogether."

"I have not yet read it, sir; but I have seen quite enough of the contents to know that it is of the very greatest importance. If I am to act for you, I must keep that letter, and if I am not to act for you——"

"Well?"

"I must hand it over to the police."

"In any case, you refuse to restore it to me?"

"I refuse to restore it to you."

In another moment we were rolling on the floor together. The clergyman had made a rush at me and upset me, and in falling I had brought him down also. I was entirely taken by surprise. I had not expected anything of this kind from a man of his cloth or his manner, but he was evidently desperate, and resolved to regain possession of the letter by fair means or foul.

I was resolved to retain it—by foul means or fair.

"You have it on you," he said, between his teeth, "and I'll throttle you to get it."

We rolled together on the floor, kicking up a terrible row against the furniture. I was in terror lest the waiters should come running up. Fortunately my room was in a back wing, and the struggle only lasted for a moment. I found the clergyman's strength giving out much quicker than I should have expected from a man of his athletic build. After the first fierce onslaught, he seemed to have no staying power. I went at him with redoubled energy, and got his hands away from my throat. In another minute I was up, breathless, with the table between us.

"That's failed, sir," I gasped. "Give it up. You won't get the letter. We shall have the waiters up in another minute. Better make yourself scarce before they come."

He stood by the door, looking undecided.

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"With, or against?" I asked. "Which will you have?"

"I don't know," he stammered. "Wait till I write. Don't do anything till I write."

I agreed to this, and he went out. He was barely gone when a waiter came hovering about the door, knocking and looking very anxious for some further information.

"I have been moving that sofa to the window," I said, "to try the light. But I think it is best as it is."

CHAPTER X.

THE LETTER.

I WENT and got the precious letter out, and laid it on the table before me. But I locked my door again first, lest the impetuous clergyman should take it into his head to pounce back on me once more. I read the letter through most carefully, and then I read it through again. I could not realize that it was a genuine document, and that I now actually found myself in possession of the facts it contained. It seemed to me almost as if I must be making them up.

The contents of this remarkable letter were as follow :—

“MY DEAR AUSTIN,—I am desperate. I do not know what to do. You must help me. Through some mistake or other of the porters, my box must

have been exchanged with Miss Simpkinson's when we left Charing Cross together yesterday. You know they are similar, and the luggage was all mixed up in the rush. Austin, she *may not open my box*. If she does, I am a lost man. I have telegraphed to you at Southend; they telegraphed me you were in Paris. Why? What is wrong? I do not know her Paris address. Keep her from my trunk, for Heaven's sake. Send it back to me. I am sending you hers. Let me have it instantly. I shall wait for it at the same place, the old Nigger's.—Yours, in the greatest anxiety,

“PHILIP.

“P.S.—Send back the trunk immediately. She *must* not see it. Help me.”

Here, then, was full corroboration of my theory, which Austin Harvey had already pronounced to be correct. And from this information it would appear that it was by accident the interchange had taken place, not as the result of any fixed design. How strange are the ways of Providence, especially with regard to the detection of crime. A crowd at the station, a little confusion with the luggage, a custom-house exami-

nation—that is all, and a whole carefully-built-up plot comes crashing down.

Thus I ruminated complacently, thinking I had now explained the difficulty and discovered the necessary clue, while, in reality, I was as far from the truth as ever, as the reader will see for himself, if he has the patience to accompany me to the end of this extraordinary story.

The name of the man to whom the box belonged was "*Philip*."

I took from my pocket-book the scrap of paper on which I had drawn the facsimile of the letters "P. H." which I had found on the white "Greenwich to South-end" label.

I laid it down on the table next to the letter, and carefully compared the P of the signature to the P of the fac-simile.

There they lay, side by side.

P Philip

When I looked at them thus, there was no doubt in my mind that the Philip of the letter was the "P" of the label. I next looked for a capital H in the letter. Here was one in "Heaven's," and here was another in "Help." I placed them next to each other.

Heaven's Help

I had no difficulty about filling in the surname. The name of the writer of the letter was Philip Harvey. The name of the owner of the black box was Philip Harvey. He was a near relation of Austin Harvey; and he was the probable murderer of Miss Raynell.

I considered I had good reason to be satisfied with the progress I had made since the day before yesterday. The crime had been committed, presumably, on Sunday night. I had first heard of it on Monday at 6.30 P.M. This was Wednes-

day morning. Not forty-eight hours, then, has elapsed since I had come across it. At that time I knew nothing. Now I had learnt the name of the victim, the place of the murder, many of the circumstances immediately subsequent to the deed, and even the name and temporary place of abode of the probable criminal.

It was now evident to me that Miss Simpkinson's first knowledge of the crime must have been received when the box—which she wrongly believed to be her own—was opened at the railway station. At that moment she must have instantly realized either that the box was not hers, or that it had been tampered with. What indications she possessed which would immediately point her to the true assassin, I had no means of determining. She had evidently concluded aright, and her first impulse had been to screen a member of her lover's family—his brother, very possibly.

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A girl of considerable fortitude, this. But I must say I prefer the mother's screams and fainting fits. They seem more natural.

The question which now came up foremost, waiting to be grappled with, was, of course, this, "How and why was the deed done?"

That question must be answered in England. It must be answered, if possible, by Mr. Philip Harvey.

I telegraphed to my employers, and made arrangements for leaving Paris that night. Any bungling young novice could take charge of the two children at the Grand Hotel. I intended to cross over to London first, there to see my employers, and to make sure of the trunk, and then to go down to Dover, and commence operations there. Philip Harvey now became the central point of all my cogitations. Philip! I must find him out and learn more about him. And I must get hold of the man before his brother found time and

opportunity to bid him fly. Good heavens! had he not already been able to do that?

I rushed over to England. Never has there been so slow a train—never so seasick and storm-tossed a vessel.

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CHAPTER XI.

AT THE TRUNKMAKER'S.

As soon as I had reached London, and spoken to my employers, I began the further investigation of the Black-Box Murder. The discovery at the Gare du Nord had taken place on Monday evening, as I have just said. I left Paris on Thursday morning, another man having come out by the Wednesday night-boat to take my place.

Before starting, I received the following note from Austin Harvey. He sent it me by post,—

"SIR,—I was beside myself this morning, and behaved like a madman. I can only explain and excuse my conduct by reference to the terrible position in which I am so unexpectedly placed. You will take into account, and make all allowance. I must beg you—in spite of my rudeness—to continue

your investigation. Anything is preferable to this horrible uncertainty. I shall remain, till further notice, at the Hotel de la Paix.—Yours, etc.,

“AUSTIN HARVEY.”

Poor fellow! Was it possible to make amends in a more frank and honorable manner? I could indeed forgive him what little injury he had done me, for, if my surmises were correct, his position was truly a most awful one.

On Friday morning, at an early hour, before customers would be arriving, I walked across to the place of business of Messrs. Browne & Elder, trunkmakers, etc., 117 Cheapside. I asked to see one of the members of the firm, and sent in my card. Before taking any other steps, I felt I must try to make myself quite certain of the actual existence of the “Philip Harvey” whom I had manufactured out of the “Philip” of Austin Harvey’s letter.

I was admitted into a little office, and received by a Mr. Elder, a complacent, substantial business man, barely past

middle age. Evidently a prosperous concern, this trunkmaking business. So much the better. The larger the trade, the more accurate the book-keeping. I should probably be able to obtain the information I was in search of.

I had hesitated for a moment, on my way to the place, whether I should present myself as an intending customer, recommended by Mr. Harvey, or openly ask for the help I required in my quality as a detective. I chose the latter alternative, because it was the simpler. During my detective career, when in doubt, I always chose the simplest way.

I described the black box I had seen at Paris as accurately as I could. Mr. Elder at once recognized the article.

"Those boxes are a specialty of ours," he said. "They were designed to supply a special want. They are very strong, very plain, and very inexpensive. They are hardly intended to carry articles of clothing, although, of course, they could be

used for that also. But they are especially suitable for books, or shooting and fishing apparatus, or any of the thousand odds and ends which people cannot pack in with their wearing apparel. Many travelers stand in need of an extra receptacle of that kind, and our boxes come in very useful at the price we are able to charge for them. We sell a great many."

"I am glad to hear that," I said politely, "although it will make my request for assistance all the more troublesome. Might I ask, do you make them in various sizes?"

"We do. There are three sizes. I will let you see them."

We went into the show-room. There stood, in a prominent position, three boxes, made exactly like the one I had seen in François Dubert's police-station, only of different dimensions. I immediately selected the medium one.

"That is the box I am in search of," I said, "and all that I want to know is, have

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you sold such a box recently to a Miss Orr-Simpkinson, and another, probably some time before, to a Mr. Harvey?"

"As for the first half of your question, I can answer that immediately—can answer it from memory," said Mr. Elder, without a moment's hesitation. "We sold a box about a week ago to a lady of that name at Southend. I remember her writing about it, describing what she wanted, and saying that a gentleman had recommended us. I can show you the letter."

He stalked off to a file hanging in his office, and, after a little searching, and one or two exclamations—such as, "That's it!" "No, it's not!" and so on—produced a sheet of notepaper, which he triumphantly laid on the table.

It was a short note from Miss Simpkinson, dated from Southend, stating that the lady desired to have one of Messrs. Browne & Elder's plain black boxes, size No. 2—thirty shillings—recommended by a gentleman who had recently purchased one. The

letter was barely ten days old. A cheque for the amount due had been enclosed, as shown by the postscript. A second postscript—rather a superfluous one, it seemed to me—stated that Miss Simpkinson required the box for packing photographic apparatus."

"That proves one half," I said—"but by far the least important half. Now, as to Mr. Harvey. Can you also help me—if only half as well—with regard to the box purchased by a Mr. Harvey?"

"Harvey, Harvey," said the trunkmaker, passing a capacious hand over a fat forehead. "That must be some time back. I do not remember the name."

He turned to a bulky ledger lying on the table, and began looking over the pages. He ran his finger rapidly down the long list of names. I stood watching anxiously. As for Miss Simpkinson's purchase, that was of very little importance; I knew enough of it already. But to find out the existence, perhaps the address, of the possessor of

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the second black box—that was altogether a different matter.

Mr. Elder knitted his eyebrows.

"The name's not here," he said. "It must have been last year."

He took down another unwieldy volume, and began hurrying through it in the same way. Suddenly his face brightened.

"Here's a Mr. Harvey," he said.

My heart gave a great leap. He pushed the book towards me, and showed me the entry. A black box, size No. 1, had been sold fifteen months ago to a Mr. John Harvey, a ship's surgeon, and sent to him on board ship at Southampton.

"That's not the man," I said; but I noted down the fact, all the same. In my mind, however, I dismissed the ship's surgeon at once. Besides, the box in Paris was a No. 2.

Mr. Elder most obligingly looked through another half year, and then closed the volume.

"I need go no further back," he said, "for we brought out the boxes about that time. They have not been in the market for more than a year and a half."

I thanked him rather half-heartedly. I wondered to myself whether he could have missed the entry. It was hardly probable.

"Can you distinguish the boxes?" I asked. "Have they all different keys?"

"Oh, yes," he answered, "they all have different keys. We never allow two similar keys to leave our premises on any account. In fact, the chief expense of the black boxes—cheap as they are—is the excellent lock we supply with them. We number all our keys. I could put my finger on any given number at once, in case of a customer's writing to have his key replaced."

"Do you number the keys?" I asked, "or the lock?"

"The key—the key only. It would hardly be safe to number the lock."

That explained my seeing no number. I think I should hardly have overlooked it.

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THE BLACK-BOX MURDER.

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But all this was provokingly useless to me now.

I had no pretext for prolonging my visit. I thanked Mr. Elder for his kindness, and took my leave. As for my Philip Harvey, he seemed to have grown a very mythical personage. None the less, I could not get the similarity of the P. H. and the handwriting of the letter out of my head. It was too extraordinary a coincidence. The only advantage I had derived from my visit to the trunkmaker was that I had obtained Miss Simpkinson's Southend address.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CRUMPLED CARD.

I LEFT Messrs. Browne & Elder's premises in rather a dejected state. Perhaps I was unreasonably dejected.

I had built too implicitly on the "Philip Harvey" theory, and now I could not deny to myself that, after all, I had no proof, absolutely no proof, of the existence of such a person.

All the same, I felt that he did exist, and that, somehow, I must get hold of evidence of his existence, and of his whereabouts. I had obtained possession of Miss Simpkinson's Southend address—23 Marine Parade. She must have lived only a few houses off from Miss Raynell, for that unfortunate lady, as Mr. Harvey had told me, had occupied apartments at No. 17.

I started for Southend that afternoon.

In the train I mused gloomily on the case. My entire view of it rested on the assumption that the black box which had contained the corpse belonged to a Mr. Philip Harvey, but I had no other proof of the existence of such a person than the P. H. faintly scrawled in a corner of the luggage-label I had discovered, and the letter to Austin from some Philip, surname unknown. I had to admit that this was not much.

As soon as I reached Southend, I went to No. 23. It was an ordinary lodging-house, exactly like all lodging-houses at all English seaside places. There was a frame with "Apartments" over the hall door, but there was no card with "To let" in any of the windows. Presumably the landlady's house was full.

I rang and knocked boldly, all the same. The worthy in question presently appeared, peeping over the banisters, and trying to

attract the attention of a certain Sally down below in a loud whisper.

Sally—probably a maid-of-all-work—refused, however, to come to her mistress' assistance, and so, ultimately, that lady descended and came across the little hall to the open door in a would-be dignified manner.

"And what might you be pleased to require, sir?" said the landlady, whose name, by-the-bye, as I soon learned, was Mrs. Bunbury. Poor Mrs. Bunbury! If she is still alive, I hereby warmly recommend her rooms.

"I am looking for apartments, madam," I answered, "and I thought that perhaps you——"

"My house is quite full," said Mrs. Bunbury, shortly.

I often wonder whether there is anywhere in all the world as great a difference between animals of the same species as that which exists between the hotel-keeper who has one room open, and the hotel-keeper who has none to spare.

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"I am sorry for that," I remarked coolly, "I had heard of your rooms. I think you had a Mrs. Orr-Simpkinson staying here for the last three weeks?"

"Yes, sir, I had," said Mrs. Bunbury. She evidently did not belong to the loquacious class of landladies.

"Pleasant lodgers, were they not?"

"Well, sir, that may be as it may be," said Mrs. Bunbury, pursing up her lips.

"I don't say they were not, and I don't say they were. I've seen better, and I've seen worse. The young lady were good. *She* give no trouble, though she were somewhat peculiar. But as for the old one, she were what they call 'nervous,' when people's rich. When people's poor they call it short in your temper."

This was a long speech for Mrs. Bunbury, and—having made it—she shut up her mouth with a snap.

"And so you have let their rooms already," I remarked suavely. "I am sorry

for that—at least for my own sake”—which was quite true, for I had wanted to see them, and had hoped, besides, to find a chattering proprietress, eager to tell all she knew. Decidedly I had no luck this time.

“Yes, they’re let,” said Mrs. Bunbury.

“And will not be vacant for some time?”

“They’re let for the next fortnight to a party as is coming down from London,” said Mrs. Bunbury. “It’s not much, one fortnight, but my rooms are never vacant long.”

“Only a fortnight!” I cried quickly.

“And I could have them after that? That might be made to suit, perhaps. But I should have liked to see them.”

“Oh, you can see them, sir,” said Mrs. Bunbury, unbending very considerably.

“The party as I was speaking of don’t come in till to-morrow, and Mrs. Simpkinson left last Monday. You can certainly see the rooms.”

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She stepped aside and invited me to enter, with a contortion of the face which was intended to be pleasing.

"No, really," I expostulated, "I cannot trouble you. Now, if you would let a maid show me the 'apartments—' I hoped to find the servant more ready to talk than the mistress.

"I prefer to show them myself," said Mrs. Bunbury.

But I made one more attempt. It is true that you can make every one do just what you like by playing on his vanity, if you care to.

"No, no, my dear madam," I exclaimed, "I really cannot allow you. I must beg of you. If you keep a girl, let your girl go up with me. That is all I require."

"If you keep a girl, indeed!"

From that moment Mrs. Bunbury's one idea was to let me see what sort of a maid she had. She rang the door bell, and—this proving futile—again screamed for Sally.

At last Sally appeared, very red about the face, but, wondrous to relate—very neat about the hair. Mrs. Bunbury was a woman who knew how to manage her household. Sally preceded me upstairs, and Mrs. Bunbury retired majestically to her private sitting-room.

The lodgings were like any other lodgings. There was nothing in them that looked as if it ever had been, or ever could be, of the faintest interest to any one. The prim furniture stood exactly where you would expect it to stand, and looked as tiresome and impersonal as you would expect it to look. The table was empty but for a little hand-bell, placed exactly in the middle. The mantelpiece showed a gilt clock, a pair of bright vases, and a pair of thin candlesticks in a regimental line. Everything was tidy and neatly brushed. Superfluities there were none.

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when my eyes fell on the grate. It was an
ordinary grate, very cold-looking at this
time of the year, with a heap of coals neatly
arranged on wood and paper. The coals
were dusty,—they had evidently lain there
for some time,—and a few paper scraps had
been thrown on top of them.

These paper scraps were worth picking
up, at anyrate. They might contain noth-
ing, and they might be of use. Who could
tell?

But how to get at them with the girl
staring at me? She had probably received
the strictest orders never to quit intending
tenants under any pretence.

I took a shilling out of my waistcoat
pocket, and held it towards the maid.

"Here's for your trouble, my good girl,"
I said.

As she stretched out her red hand, I
dropped the coin, then stumbled as it fell,
and deliberately kicked it under a chest of

drawers. The thing was clumsily done, but it attained my object.

The girl looked longingly in the direction in which the shilling had disappeared.

"We must get it out," I said. "The tongs are too big. Run for my umbrella; it's in the hall downstairs."

Sally disappeared, and in a moment I had snatched the odd scraps of paper off the coals. Two or three of them, I saw at a glance, were remnants of torn-up tradesmen's cards; one was a private visiting-card, with something scribbled at the back. It was doubled in two. I opened it, and read the name—

MR. PHILIP HARVEY.

I turned the card. On the back was scrawled: "At 2.30, then. How jolly!"

I saw immediately that the "H" of "How jolly" was exactly similar to the "H's" in the letter signed "Philip," and also, as I then thought, to the "H" on the luggage-label. I made a mistake as to

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this latter item, but I still think it was a pardonable one.

The maid came running back with my umbrella, and I hurriedly put the scraps of paper into my pocket.

Philip Harvey was a reality, then, after all.

I questioned the maid about the lodgers while we fished for the shilling, and found her quite willing to talk, if only she had something to tell.

"Yes, the two ladies had stayed there three weeks, and was haffable; only the holder one did 'ate to ring twice, and used to go into the most hawful tantrums, has if a poor girl 'ad four legs to 'er body. No, there didn't use to come very many people to see 'em, 'cos they didn't know many people in Southend; but a hold lady came wunst, what looked fearful cross, with white 'air and a wicked hold face"—there, there, my good Sally, the old lady is dead; *de mortuis nil nisi bonum*, you know—"and the two gents as was allus a-coming."

"What two gents?"

"Why, the clergyman and t'other one—his brother. Pleasant spoken gent, the clergyman. They was 'ere as much as 'arf-a-dozen times a day sometimes. And Miss Simpkinson—well"—Sally looked volumes—"Miss Simpkinson was *engaged* to the clergyman," said Sally, in a most meaning way.

I could not get out of her what she meant. "Miss Simpkinson was *engaged* to the clergyman," said Sally.

I should have learned a good deal more, perhaps, had Mrs. Bunbury not come shuffling about the hall.

"There's missis," said Sally, who had recovered her shilling. "Don't you think we'd better go down again now, sir?"

She ran off as she spoke, and I was obliged to follow her. On the landing I still obtained a hurried description of the two gentlemen who used to call. I recognized the one immediately as Austin Harvey.

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"The other was like him, rather, but thinner and sallow, and looked, between you and me, as if he'd led a bit of a wild life, sir. That was Mr. Philip, sir; and he wasn't a bad-looking chap either."

"The rooms are excellent, madam," I said to the landlady, who stood waiting impatiently in the hall downstairs, "and just suitable, I should think;" and I talked about the terms with her, and found those suitable too.

Mrs. Bunbury was very anxious to know the name of her intending lodger.

"Spence," I said. "Mr. Spence, from London."

I do not deal in aliases; they always get you into trouble. I took one, once for all, thirty years ago, to spare the feelings of an honored father, and I have stuck to that ever since. It is more my own name than an alias now.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SCENE OF THE MURDER.

FROM No. 23 I went to No. 17, as soon as I was sure Mrs. Bunbury had given up watching me down the street. I had to go through a repetition of the same comedy at No. 17. I asked for apartments, of course. No. 17 possessed a loquacious landlady, a very old woman, half blind, and considerably more than half deaf, whose deafness, however, had by no means marred her loquacity. Like so many of her class, she had seen "better days," and she mournfully rejoiced in the recollection of them. Those better days are often of a most mysterious goodness, and the worse the present moment seems to be, the brighter doth that better past become in the memory and on the lips of the unfortu-

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nate. The landlady's name was Mrs. Jessop. Her husband had been a clergyman.

I was surprised to hear that Miss Raynell's rooms were not to be let. I was still more surprised to hear—in fact, I could not suppress a slight shiver—that Miss Raynell was still occupying them.

"She has gone up to London for a day or two," said Mrs. Jessop, "but I expect her back in the course of the week."

Poor old lady! She had gone up to London, indeed. Mrs. Jessop told me all I wanted to know about her lodgers, and even a good deal more, which is saying much for a detective. She had a most irritating, affected little cough, which came up between every bunch of half-a-dozen words, and hooked them together and on to the next batch. It was a nervous cough. Probably her deafness prevented her hearing it. Perhaps it was one of the genteel appurtenances she had saved out of the wreck of her former days.

"No, the rooms are not disengaged," said Mrs. Jessop. "The lady who occupies them—h'm h'm—has gone up to London for a week. You appear to know her, sir, so you will not be surprised at my saying that Miss Raynell—with all her good qualities—is—h'm h'm—very peculiar. She does not like to be—h'm—intruded on, as she calls it. Not that I ever intruded on any one," Mrs. Jessop continued, with a toss of her head, "but I have never shunned the society of my equals. Miss Raynell appears to do so. And she cannot complain that, once this being hinted—merely *hinted*, you may be sure,—she got too much of mine. I should have—h'm h'm—scorned to impose it. I have known better days, sir, and I am well aware that no lady would impose—h'm—her society on any other lady."

I began to understand that Miss Raynell, whether she was peculiar or not, must have found Mrs. Jessop a nuisance. I cut off the overflow by asking if Miss Raynell

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had her nephews with her. I had to call out the question once or twice. Decidedly, the old woman was very deaf.

"Her nephews," said the landlady, "were with her a good deal off and on. The eldest was, as you are perhaps aware—h'm—at the church of Mary the Virgin—not a church I should care to attend, sir. My people have never countenanced popish practices, and my dear husband used to say——"

"And Philip?" I interrupted. I could not help it. "*C'était plus fort que moi*," as the French say.

"Philip—h'm—as I believe the young man was called, rather a—h'm—wild young man, I should say, only that *no* young men are considered wild now-a-days. Philip has a small room here, which he occupies sometimes, next to the old lady's. He's here off and on. He doesn't—h'm—get on too well with his aunt. She is—h'm—peculiar, and not always pleasant spoken to her elder nephew, who is, I believe, a

most estimable young man, in spite of his papistical proclivities. But—h'm—as my dear husband used to say——”

“Has Mr. Philip Harvey been here since his aunt left, Mrs. Jessop?”

“He has not, sir. The rooms are—h'm—not being used for the moment. Would you like to see them? They are—h'm—as good as any rooms in Southend.”

I acquiesced with alacrity. There was a pleasant bay-windowed front room on the ground floor. Behind this was a good-sized bedroom, with a little chamber communicating with it.

“The rooms are just as Miss Raynell left them,” said Mrs. Jessop. “She started on Monday morning without as much as saying—h'm—good-bye—just walked out of the house at an unearthly hour, and left a scrap of a note—h'm—on her sitting-room table.”

“Mrs. Jessop,” I said, confronting her in the bow-window. “I have not come here to look for apartments. I am a detective

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—a private detective from London. Miss Raynell is peculiar, as you say. Yes, she is decidedly peculiar. She has gone up to London without informing her nephews of her whereabouts. Of course it is all right, but they are naturally anxious, none the less, lest anything should befall her. Mr. Austin Harvey has requested me to take the necessary steps for tracing her. I must bid you let see me that note she left behind her.”

“Well, I never!” said Mrs. Jessop.

She was scared out of her cough for the moment. The majesty of the law weighed heavily upon her, and she probably fancied herself already half-way on the road to prison. She bustled away to bring me the paper. On a scrap of flesh-colored note, which looked like half a halfpenny newspaper wrapper, was written in a shaky female hand,—

“I am going up to London for a few days.—E. RAYNELL.”

There was nothing else. I folded up the paper, and put it away in my pocket-book.

"I shall have to keep this," I said; "and now, Mrs. Jessop, did any one in this house see Miss Raynell on Monday morning? Did you?"

"Not I," said Mrs. Jessop, when she fully understood my question; "I am not up at all times of the night to suit my lodger's whimsies. I work hard all day—h'm—a good deal harder than I ever thought I should have to, and I take my rest at night."

"You think no one else saw her—no servant, for instance?"

"I have only one maid just at present," said Mrs. Jessop magnificently; "once upon a time I had three, and a man. My present maid does not sleep in the house. She leaves at nine, and comes early next morning. It is an arrangement, sir, which has many advantages. There is a security——"

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"You had no other lodgers in the house?"

"Not a soul. My second-floor comes in to-morrow."

"Who were in the house on the night from Sunday to Monday? Give all details as briefly and accurately as possible," I said—or rather shouted—looking very stern.

"Miss Raynell had been alone the greater part of Sunday. She had gone to St. Stephen's, round the corner, in the morning. St. Stephen's is one of those churches which—h'm—as my dear husband used to say——"

"As briefly as possible," I shouted.

"H'm! In the afternoon her nephew, Austin, came to see her. They quarrelled, at least—h'm—the old lady abused her nephew. I must say this of Mr. Austin Harvey, that he never answers his aunt roughly—always as soft and kind as can be. But she—h'm—abuses him, as she abuses the other one, who answers back

again and gives her as good as he gets. Austin's all gentleness. She dined alone, and Austin came back for half an hour in the evening. There was another scene then—at least, so the girl said—I'm too deaf; I don't hear. When Mr. Austin went away to his evening service—h'm—the old lady sat alone in the front room reading, and at ten she went to bed. That was the last of her—she left the house before seven on Monday morning, before the girl had come in, so as to catch the early train. I heard the door bang myself."

"You did not see her go?"

"No."

"Was she in the habit of slipping out like that?"

"She was—h'm—I regret to say. She goes for walks along the cliffs before breakfast. She breakfasts—h'm—at eight, summer and winter, I believe. - A glass of milk is always put in the sitting-room over night, and she takes that, with a biscuit, before starting."

"Was the glass emptied on Monday morning?"

"No; she never came back."

"Was the glass emptied on Monday morning?"

"Oh yes, it was."

I hesitated for a moment.

"The murderer must have emptied it," I said to myself, not without a slight shudder at the thought. "Not an everyday assassin, this Mr. Philip Harvey."

"And Philip Harvey," I resumed—"when was he last here?"

"Philip Harvey—h'm—as I was going to state," said the landlady, "slept here on the night from Sunday to Monday." I started, but did not interrupt her. "He had been here last—h'm—on Saturday. He came in on Sunday evening at about half-past nine. I let him in, for the servant had just gone."

"And when did he leave?"

"Eh?"

"When did he go away on Monday?"

"Oh, he doesn't—h'm—get up early, as a rule, you may be sure, but he had to, comparatively, that day. He left for London at nine o'clock."

"Alone?"

"No; his brother came to fetch him. He breakfasted in his bedroom, and then they left together in a cab."

"With luggage?"

"Yes, a portmanteau, and—h'm—a big black box he has, Mr. Detective—for books, he says."

"For books? Surely he is hardly the man, by your description, to do much reading."

"He is irregular, sir, off and on. He is a medical student, I believe, or supposed to be, and he has a certain amount—h'm—of books in his room."

"But did he come and go as he chose, Mrs. Jessop?"

"He did. And I'm sorry to say, Mr. Officer, and ashamed to say it—h'm—that

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I allowed Miss Raynell to have the latch-key of this house. It's a thing I have never done before, and a thing I shall never do again, but she is not a good—h'm—woman to contradict, and besides, she pays extra for it."

"How much did she pay, Mrs. Jessop, for that privilege?"

"Five shillings a week, sir, and I very much fear she sometimes gives the key to her nephews."

"Was that like her?"

"Well, she's contrary and indulgent, alternately—there's no saying."

I have given this conversation in as few words as possible, cutting down Mrs. Jessop's elucubrations wherever I could. It was a fatiguing conversation, for the old lady was very deaf and decrepit, and hardly ever understood me at once. Still, we managed to flounder through it somehow, and the facts it revealed to me were important enough. It gave me, as it were, the whole *mis-en-scène* of the murder.

I sent for the maid and questioned her; but that was useless. The maid knew nothing. She had left the house on Sunday night before Philip entered it, and when she came back on Monday morning, Miss Raynell had already disappeared. I only learnt from her that the black box had been extremely heavy. The cabman had sworn over it as he dragged it on to the top of his cab. Philip Harvey had merely said,—

“Yes, it is heavy. It is full of books.”

She had taken in Mr. Philip's breakfast at half-past eight when he rang. She had admitted Mr. Austin about half-an-hour earlier. Mr. Austin had gone in to his brother. When she brought in the breakfast, Mr. Philip was up and dressed. Mr. Austin inquired about his aunt, and she had told him that Miss Raynell had left an hour ago for London. While she was in the room Mr. Austin had said, “So your box is packed?” and Mr. Philip had answered, “Of course it is; not a book left in the place. I'm glad you found the key, or

questioned her; the maid knew the house on Sunday, and when the morning, Miss Raynell said. I only the box had been when an had sworn the top of his head, I only said,—"full of books." Philip's breakfast was left. She had a half-an-hour alone in to his room in the breakfast-dressed. Mr. Jessop, and she had left an hour when he was in the room. "So your box had answered, the book left in the room and the key, or

what should I have done?" Half-an-hour later they had rung for a cab. The two gentlemen had moved the heavy box out on to the steps, and had helped the cabman. Mr. Philip had told the man to drive to the station.

No one in the house had seen anything or heard anything of the brothers or of their aunt since.

I expressed my desire to see the bedrooms. Miss Raynell's was perfectly neat, but still it looked as if the occupant had left it unexpectedly. All the toilet articles were on the table or in its drawers.

"Do you know whether a bonnet and shawl of Miss Raynell's are missing?" I said to the landlady.

Mrs. Jessop could not tell, "her mind being above such petty spying;" but the maid assured me that Miss Raynell possessed but one bonnet, and one round black straw hat for the beach.

In a cupboard we found the straw hat hung up, and the bonnet in a box.

"Lawks!" cried Polly, "she must have gone to London without her hat."

"Nonsense," I said sharply. "You must have made a mistake. She had another bonnet, doubtless."

The young man's room contained nothing of interest. He had taken his things away with him. I went back to Miss Raynell's room. There was a second cupboard in the wall. I opened it. It was stocked up to the top with books—medical, most of them, as I saw at a glance.

"Lawks!" cried Polly again. "And he to say he hadn't left a book in the house! But however did they get here?"

I returned to the sitting-room, mistress and maid following me.

"Mrs. Jessop," I said—shouted—as impressively as I could, "and you Mary Hopkins, Miss Raynell has gone, as I told you, to London without leaving an address. There is nothing in that, but I can understand her nephew's anxiety. She is not at her own house. We must find out where

she is. I have received the necessary information. But mind you, this inquiry must remain strictly private." I put on a magisterial air. "In the Queen's name I bind you over to keep the peace and this trust. If others come about here inquiring, the less you tell them the better for you. Remember, should a word of all this become public, it *must* be through your agency, for no one else is informed of it besides Mr. Harvey and myself. We shall at once trace it home to you. Will you swear to keep the peace? An infraction will involve an action for breach of confidence. In the Queen's name, swear!"

"Oh, dear, yes," said Mrs. Jessop, trembling.

"Oh, lawk a mussy," said Polly.

I do enjoy humbugging fools. "That'll make it pleasant for the Scotland Yard men," I said to myself. "Thank you, no, gentlemen; this murder's my little job, and I've two-thirds settled it already."

"And now, Mrs. Jessop," I remarked, "what did your husband use to say about the papists?"

It was a little compensation I owed her. I spare the reader.

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CHAPTER XIV.

THE OLD NIGGER'S.

ONE other thing I gathered from Mrs. Jessop's remarks before I left her. When Philip Harvey came home on that Sunday night, he had taken more wine than was good for him.

"And is Philip a left-handed man, Mrs. Jessop?" I asked, suddenly turning as I was taking my leave.

"I could not say, sir, never having—h'm—noticed."

"And you, Miss Polly?"

Polly did not know either. She did not think so.

"And what am I to say when Miss Raynell comes back?" asked the landlady.

"Where am I—h'm—to write to let you know?"

"Write to Mr. Austin," I said, running down the steps.

I could not bear the way in which she innocently went on speaking of the dead woman as of a person still alive.

I was not dejected on the return journey. On the contrary, I was elated. I am an easily impressed man, I fear, but still any one would have admitted that I had made enormous progress. It was not likely that the French or English police would overtake me now, although I had no doubt they were following close on my heels. All that remained for me to do was to discover the present abode of the murderer.

I had heard from Mrs. Jessop that the bed in Miss Raynell's room had been slept in on the last night of her stay in the house. This led me to conclude that the murder had been committed early on Monday morning; not, as the French doctors had affirmed, late on Sunday night.

It was evident to me that Philip Harvey had returned home on Sunday night either

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really the worse for drink, or else pretending to be so. He had gone up to his room, and passed the night there, and had penetrated into his aunt's room in the early morning, when she was up and dressed. It was possible that Miss Raynell had even drunk the glass of milk herself. Her nephew had struck her down, and then chloroformed her, as his studies as a medical student would probably have taught him. He had then packed the body into his box, under pretence of carrying off his books, and had thus taken it away to the station. Some wonderful mischance had mixed up the fatal box at Charing Cross with Mrs. Simpkinson's luggage, and the rest of the horrible drama had developed itself before my eyes.

This was my theory of the murder as it stood at present—on the Friday following.

I have said just now that nothing more remained for me but to find out the abode of the murderer. I must not, however, forget one other point. I knew nothing as

yet of the motives which had led to the deed. As long as I do not know the motives of a crime, I consider that crime still altogether unexplained.

I could learn nothing with regard to this subject from Mrs. Jessop. Miss Raynell had not been a talkative woman, and the landlady knew absolutely nothing about her lodger's antecedents. I must find out these, if possible, from the murderer himself. I resolved to start for Dover that very evening. I felt that, in the state of mind I was in at present, I must meet everywhere with success.

Philip Harvey had been at Dover on Tuesday. So his letter showed. He would probably have remained there, anxiously awaiting the return of his box, which, as I knew, Austin was unable to send him.

Would Austin warn him? This question I could not answer with certainty. It had struck me that Austin had told me, during our interview at the "Pension," where Miss Simpkinson was confined, that his aunt had

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been staying alone at No. 17 Marine Parade. He had evidently not considered it incumbent on him to describe his brother as staying with her, that brother being only an occasional visitor. It was only natural that Austin Harvey should do all he could to save his brother from the gallows. That brother would, I felt sure of it, reach the gallows nevertheless. I had the rope round his neck already.

I took the letter from my pocket-book as I sat in the train, and puzzled over it in the hope of finding some indication of the whereabouts of the murderer.

"The old place, the old nigger's"—that was all.

"Nigger" was probably not to be taken literally. If by any chance it should refer to a black man, my task would be very much facilitated. There could not be many black men in Dover. But it was much more probable that it would prove to be some nickname, or some allusion which I

could not understand. I must go to Dover and trust my luck.

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There was one other point which remained unelucidated in my mind. Philip Harvey had traveled from Southend to London with the black box containing his aunt's body. Then why did that box—which had been *immediately* passed on to Paris—not show evidence of that preliminary journey in the shape of a luggage-label of some sort, marked either "London" alone, or "Southend to London?"

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I did not go straight on to Dover, but drove to the office first. I was very glad I had done so, for I found a letter waiting me from Austin Harvey. It had arrived that morning just after my departure from Southend.

"SIR," said the letter,—“I feel more and more that ever since my reckless folly, or, as it would seem, God's avenging provi-

dence placed us in your hands, and at your mercy, I have been unwise to try and hold out. You know too much. You know enough, however, to understand by what anxieties I am distracted and led wrong. I am resolved to do my duty, come what may.

"And forgive me if after a fearful struggle, I have decided that my conscience commanded, or, at anyrate, allowed me to save one very near and dear to me from a fate too terrible to contemplate. I must confess my deed and take the consequences. Immediately after I had left you, I telegraphed to 'Philip,' warned him, and bade him fly. By this time he is, I hope, in safety. God forgive me if I did wrong, but I *could* not help it. How could I?

"Do not go to Dover; it would be absolutely useless. You will find no one there. By this time, doubtless, you know half the miserable story. The remaining half—it is no use my trying to mislead my-

self—awaits you at Southend. You know that as well as I do. I shall remain here in Paris and await events. In judging me take my awful position into account. Heaven have mercy upon us all.

“AUSTIN HARVEY.”

When I had read this letter, I walked straight to Charing Cross Station and took the train for Dover.

The only thing I wanted to know at this moment was : where was Philip Harvey staying, or where had he stayed while at Dover? I puzzled over the “old nigger” in the train, but, of course, I could come to no satisfactory conclusion.

We reached Dover, and I alighted. As I walked down the platform, I found myself confronted by a board full of advertisements, and amongst these stood out prominently the grinning heads of two turbaned blackamoors. It was the advertisement of a small hotel called the “Saracen’s Head.”

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I took a fly and ordered the man to drive me to a commercial hotel. I had never stayed in Dover, though I had passed through it a dozen times and more, and I knew nothing of its accommodation, except that the "Lord Warden" was first-class and expensive. As the man drove off in the direction of the town, I bethought me of the name I had come across at the station. I put my head out at the window, and asked the fly-driver if he knew the "Saracen's Head."

Oh, yes, he knew it. It was a sort of first-class public-house or grill-room—a restaurant on a small scale, with lodging-rooms upstairs.

"That will do," I said; and so we drove there.

CHAPTER XV.

PHILIP HARVEY.

It was rapidly getting dark when we reached the "Saracen's Head." Just as the cab drew up at the door, a man came running hurriedly out, the sight of whom made me shrink back into a corner. It was Austin Harvey. He seemed very much perturbed, and passed on without looking to right or left.

All at once, as soon as I saw Austin Harvey, the connection flashed across my brain. "The old nigger!" "The Saracen's Head!" I was amazed at my own dulness. My good fortune had led me to the very house from which Philip Harvey had written his letter. There was a big black head, grinning away over the door.

Austin's presence here convinced me

that his brother was also near. I did not doubt that I should have found him, in any case, in a day or two, but I was none the less glad to save so much time and trouble.

"So Austin Harvey can tell lies also," I said to myself. But immediately afterwards I reasoned that this was unjust. Doubtless he had declared his intention to remain where he was in perfect good faith, and it was only later on, when his advice proved fruitless, that he had hurried over to save his brother before it was too late.

From all this I could quickly draw the conclusion that it *was* too late, and that I had Philip Harvey in my power.

The hostelry was a very simple one. I engaged a bed, and ordered a chop in the coffee-room in an hour's time. As the waiter was leaving the room, I said,—

"Any one staying in the house at present?"

A number of people had been there yesterday, it appeared. At present there were not very many.

"I met a gentleman this evening who is staying here, I believe," I said carelessly. "A tall, fair man, rather sallow. You don't happen to know whom I mean, and if his name's Thompson?"

It was a wild shot. The waiter looked puzzled.

"No," he said; "there was a gentleman in the house who answered to my description; but his name was not Thompson. He was a Mr. Harvey; and, besides, he hadn't been out of his room all day. He was in it now."

This was all I required to know.

"That's not the man," I said. "It doesn't matter." And I dismissed the waiter.

Philip Harvey, then, was staying in the house, and he was actually there under his own name. I had expected to learn his *alias* from the waiter.

I went down to dinner and attacked my chop. It was really very fair. I felt in excellent spirits, and I had half a pint of

sherry instead of my customary porter. This inquiry was going to be a success for me. It ought, I felt, to make my reputation. While the French authorities and the English detectives were bungling over the black box, and worrying Miss Simpkinson, I had got all the threads of the mystery into my hands. Philip Harvey could still escape before I laid the necessary information against him; but the family would have to come down handsomely before I let him go. That was only fair.

As I sat thinking over my sherry after dinner, dozing a little, perhaps, in the comfortable coffee-room,—I was quite alone there,—I suddenly found myself startled by the violent opening of the door. A man came in noisily, stumbling forward as he walked. I saw at a glance that this was Philip Harvey. He had his brother's tall slender figure, and his brother's fair hair. But there the resemblance came to an end. He had neither his brother's fresh com-

plexion nor his clear blue eyes. His cheeks were sallow, and his eyes had a furtive, frightened look in them.

He rang the bell violently also, and began pacing up and down the sanded floor. When the waiter looked in, he called for "another, hot and strong." I should have said he had had enough already.

He had passed me once or twice with side-long glances; all of a sudden he stopped in front of me, like a man who makes up his mind.

"Can you talk?" he said. "Are you sociable? Damn it, in a hole like this, one must get through the evening somehow."

I woke up immediately.

"That was just what I was thinking," I said, with alacrity. "I shall be only too glad, I am sure, to make your acquaintance, sir. Shall we settle down in this corner?"

Philip Harvey threw himself down on a sofa against the wall, and I took a chair opposite him, with a little table between

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"That looks excellent," I remarked cheerfully. "I cannot do better than keep you company."

Harvey ordered the man to bring a second glass, with another oath. He garnished his conversation freely with these superfluities.

He went on grumbling a little about the place and the weather (which latter had been very fine all day). I tried one or two allusions to the public events of the moment, but he "damned my politics" so vigorously that I hastened to retreat from that track. Not by any means a pleasant-spoken man, this Mr. Philip Harvey. A man with a conscience not at rest.

"My name is Spence," I said, after some more beating about the bush. I considered that preliminaries had now taken up sufficient time. "Mr. Spence, of London. May I know whom I have the pleasure of spending the evening with?"

"Yes, damn it. My name's Harvey—Philip Harvey—and I'm not ashamed of it."

"Indeed, no; why should you be? Might I inquire if you happen to be a connection of Mr. Austin Harvey, the South-end clergyman? I should not ask, of course, only something in your manner reminded me of him as you came in."

"The man's my brother," said Philip.

"Indeed! Now, that is very extraordinary. I met your brother in Paris a week or so ago. Let me see—no, not a week. This is Friday. It must have been as recently as last Tuesday. I was quite surprised to see him in Paris, and yet, really, I don't see why I should have been."

"Humph," said my companion, reaching for a cigar-light.

"And how is your good aunt, Miss Raynell?"

Harvey's face turned white. He trembled all over. He had the greatest diffi-

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" Damn Miss Raynell," he said hoarsely.
" I mean to say, she's all right, the miserly old scarecrow. You seem to know the whole family, you, sir. I never heard of you before."

" Oh, yes, I know all about you," I said.
" You shouldn't abuse Miss Raynell on the score of economy, though. A penny saved by her is a penny gained by you, isn't it?"

Philip Harvey struck his fist on the table.

" No, it isn't," he shouted. " And if you knew as much about the family as you think you do, you wouldn't have said that. Austin's her heir—always was. And if any one is ever to have any advantage from her death, it'll be Austin. And it was in my interest to keep her alive as long as I could."

He lowered his voice, and said these last words to himself, but I heard them distinctly.

The news startled me more than I liked to confess to myself. I had no doubt of the man's sincerity. There was a rough straightforwardness about Philip Harvey. If anything, he was too straightforward, as he certainly was too rough.

"Well, never mind," I said. "Will you have another drink? Let me ring."

"All right; thank you, and let's give up talking rot. Do you play cards?" said Philip Harvey.

"Some games," I replied, not without a little hesitation.

This was not the most agreeable gentleman one would care to play cards with.

"That's right. Here you, Robert, you scoundrel, get us a pack of cards."

The cards were brought, and we sat down to play *euchre*. Harvey played well, but he drank too much. He took up the cards to shuffle and deal, and as he took them up and held them, one thing struck me for which I had not been prepared.

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THE BLACK-BOX MURDER.

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CHAPTER XVI.

AN AWKWARD QUESTION.

WE played on for some time in comparative silence. I won, and this did not improve Mr. Harvey's temper. He began throwing the cards about, and ordered another glass of grog.

Now and then we exchanged a few words about the game. Occasionally Philip would mutter an oath over his cards or over any especial stroke of luck on my part. I looked across at his skulking face with, I fear, an ugly look in my eyes. I hated the drunken scoundrel. Here was a cowardly murderer of old women growling and swearing at his betters. I had but to speak a word, and the fellow lay in gaol. How his hand trembled as he held the cards. He was half-besotted with drink already.

I lifted my glass. It was still more than half full. I am a temperate man.

"As you say, it is to your advantage she should live," I said. "I drink Miss Raynell's health, and—Miss Simpkinson's." I sipped a few drops.

"Thank you," mumbled Philip, without touching his glass.

I hate a rude man.

"Miss Simpkinson," I began again, "the charming——"

Suddenly Philip Harvey turned into a gentleman.

"I do not consider, sir," he said haughtily, "that our very slight acquaintanceship authorizes your introducing that young lady's name as a subject of conversation. Have the goodness to choose another one. I esteem Miss Simpkinson too highly to make her the subject of a tavern jest."

I was slightly abashed, but a good deal more irritated. I noticed the complete change of manner, the change of voice.

"He loves Miss Simpkinson," I said to myself, "and she is engaged to marry his brother."

He wanted another subject of conversation. I resolved that he should have it. What I next said, I said more from spite than from any better consideration. We are all human, and have our little weaknesses at times.

"I do not wonder you esteem her highly," I said, as I cut the cards. "But what has become of her esteem for you, do you think, since she looked into your black box the other day?"

Philip Harvey dropped his hands, with the cards in them, and stared blankly at me for a moment. Then—with a rapid movement—before I could realize what he was about to do, he flung the whole pack in my face. His glass followed immediately after, still full of grog. I dodged that, however, and it went crashing into a mirror behind me. Then the man rose from his seat, and,

without another word or look, strode out of the room as best he could.

I remained behind, very much ruffled and annoyed. I resented, of course, the manner in which I had been treated; and I resented it all the more because I felt it was more than half deserved. It had been ruffianly of me to make that crude reference to the black-box tragedy, and, worse than that, it had been excessively stupid. I, who had been so successful and so wary till now—I had given way to a childish freak of ill-temper. In striving to "pay out" my adversary, I had put him prematurely on his guard.

As soon as I began to cool down, I felt that I must now seek to make sure of my man. The broken mirror rendered this much easier for me than it would otherwise have been. I immediately sent for the landlord,—a waiter had come running at the sound of broken glass,—and when the landlord arrived, I told him that I had just been most violently assaulted in his house

by a gentleman with whom I was barely acquainted. He did not seem to consider this of very much importance, but he was highly incensed at the sight of the broken mirror. He assured me the man could pay, and he started for his room even now to make him do so. I stopped him.

"The fellow's drunk," I said, "and you'll hardly get anything out of him to-night—except abuse."

"Well, that's true," said the landlord dubiously; "but I must have my money, all the same."

"Wait till to-morrow morning," I cried hastily, "and take measures to prevent his escaping you in the meantime."

It was a means, as I saw at once, of repairing my own mistake. I must enlist the landlord as a watch on my man.

"He's not fit to speak to just now," I said. "And you're bound to get your money to-morrow."

"There's a tiny bolt on the outside of some of my doors," said the landlord. "I

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find it often comes convenient with customers what's had too much. There's one on his. I'll just slip it across in an hour or two, when he's asleep. He won't jump from the second floor in a hurry."

It was a great relief to me to hear this. I went up to my room with a lighter heart, but I could not sleep much all night for thinking of that man lying under the same roof with me—lying with those imprudent, awful words of mine rankling in his breast, lying waiting for what the morning would bring forth.

What the morning would bring forth! I myself had but a vague idea as yet what I should ask of it; and little did I know what an amazing discovery it held in store for me.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MISSING LUGGAGE-LABEL FOUND.

I WOKE up next morning from a restless sleep, into which I had fallen at break of day, and saw, to my surprise, that it was already eight o'clock. Immediately my thoughts reverted to "my prisoner," as I had begun to call him. Was he in his own room still? Of what was he thinking? Had the landlord, perhaps, already settled with him? I hurried on my clothes, and ran out on to the landing. My room was situated on the first floor; Harvey's was on the second, but not over mine.

As I opened my door, I heard Austin Harvey's voice downstairs, inquiring for his brother. I heard the waiter answer that Mr. Harvey was still in his room. No one had seen him, or been into him as yet. A

great weight was taken off my mind. Austin Harvey came upstairs, and I shrank back behind my door.

As soon as he had passed, I crept out on to the landing again. I heard him calling to his brother, and trying the locked door. No sound came from the other side. I suddenly found myself trembling again with the thought that my prey might have escaped me—my legitimate prey, mind you.

"He *is* in there," said the waiter. "He's pretending to be asleep, sir."

They conferred for a moment in a low voice, and then both went into the room adjoining Philip's, which was exactly over mine. There was a door of communication between the two adjoining rooms. It was locked, but the waiter had the key. Austin threw down his overcoat on a chair in the unused room, and quickly passed through a side-door into his brother's presence.

He had scarcely left the room before I

was in it. I slipped half-a-crown into the waiter's hand.

"I take this room," I said, in a voice not much above a whisper. "You can move my things in presently, as soon as I ring. It is more airy, I fancy."

And I pushed the astonished man out, and watched him downstairs. In his bewilderment he had left the key on the floor. I felt that matters were coming to a crisis.

I shut the door on to the landing, and locked it ; but, before I did so, I had slipped the bolt to outside Philip's room, and thus prevented egress in that direction. I did not dare attempt to re-lock the door between the two rooms, and thus shut the two brothers in altogether. They would be sure to hear the click. So I locked myself in with them.

From the sound of voices in the next room, I perceived that Austin had indeed found his brother, so that the waiter's statement had been correct. I strained my ear

by the door, but I could not hear what they were saying. They spoke too low.

This was, of course, a great annoyance and disappointment to me, but I had to bear it as best as I could. I took comfort in the thought that, perhaps, in time, as they became more animated, their voices would rise to a higher pitch. In the meantime I sat down beside the door, and looked round the bare room.

The first thing that attracted my attention was Austin Harvey's coat, thrown carelessly on a chair. I took it up mechanically, and, obeying the rule of my profession, began to examine it, and feel in the pockets. I did not expect it would contain anything of interest, but, being engaged in the Harvey case, of course I could not leave the overcoat lying there without having a look at it.

I soon came to the conclusion that it did, indeed, contain nothing of any importance,

and I laid it down again. I had found a pair of black kid gloves in one pocket, a small prayer-book in another, and a couple of shillings in a card-slit under the right breast. In the breast-pocket on the left was a pocket-handkerchief.

After I had laid the coat down I took it up again. The whispering in the next room continued. I had nothing else to do; mechanically I once more felt in the pockets. I drew out the handkerchief for the second time, and, just as I was about to replace it, some indefinite curiosity tempted me to plunge down my hand still more deeply into the pocket. This time I felt a little crushed up ball in one corner. The pocket was an exceptionally deep one. I drew out a slip of thin paper, which had been crumpled up, and thrust down into the pocket, and forgotten there. I flattened it out. It proved to be merely a luggage-label, "Southend to London."

"Southend to London." Not of much importance. Still, that was the very label

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I had missed off Philip Harvey's box at Paris.

"Southend to London." How came this paper forgotten in a recess of Austin Harvey's coat?

The explanation seemed easy enough. It was a label from some piece of luggage of his. Living in Southend, as he did, he must have come up to London a score of times.

Satisfactory as the explanation was, it did not satisfy me.

While I still sat staring at the luggage-label, exactly the thing I had hoped for came to pass. Philip Harvey's voice rose in the heat of the discussion.

"I don't believe I did it," he said emphatically. "Whatever you may say, I can't believe I did it."

"I don't believe I did it!" Did what? Surely not the murder? Was the man capable of acting such a part to his own brother?

"Hush," said Austin ; but, after a moment, it was Austin's voice which rose.

"And therefore must be," were the first words I heard him say. "Oh, Philip, Philip, why do you not admit it? For whose profit are you lying thus? Once more, does not your own letter to me in Paris prove beyond doubt that you knew what were the contents of that horrible box? And now you deny it. Oh, Philip, Philip!"

"The box!" cried Philip, in a terrified tone. "Don't talk of it! There's another fiend in this house who pursues me with that box. No, I swear that before you forced your way in here this minute, I had no idea what there was in my box—good heavens! I can't believe it even now—the dead body of Aunt Elizabeth! I don't believe it, Austin. You're fooling me. She's told you what happened on Sunday night, and you're trying to frighten me into saying I'm sorry. Well, I am sorry. But her dead body in the box! I won't believe

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And, to my unbounded surprise, the rough fellow burst into quite a passion of weeping.

There was a short silence. Then Austin said, distinctly and impressively, in a cold voice, not like his usual genial tones,—

“ You killed her that Sunday night, Philip. You know you did. Dare you, in the sight of heaven, before the memory of our dead parents—dare you deny that you struck her down on that Sunday night ?”

I pressed my head against the panel. I listened for the answer in a tremble of suspense. It came, but, in spite of all my straining, I could not catch it. There was a long pause. I ground my teeth with impotent disappointment. Presently, however, Austin spoke audibly again, and I gathered something of Philip’s answer from what I now heard his brother say.

“ Then, if you are not unwilling to deny that first horrible point,” said Austin, “ why,

in the name of madness, do you deny the rest?"

"I admit what I remember," cried Philip excitedly; "I won't admit any more."

"You will not deny that you were drunk on that night?"

"No," said Philip sturdily.

"Too drunk to know what you were about, as is only too frequently your condition, my poor brother."

As far as I could make out, Philip was silent.

"Listen," began Austin; but Philip interrupted him.

"Does Edith know it all?" he cried eagerly.

"Of course she knows a good deal," said Austin. "You cannot deny that you have repeatedly declared you would do the old woman some mischief if she bothered you any longer about your—your habits. You have said so to Edith."

"Yes," admitted Philip; "in fun."

"Very well," continued Austin. "On

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Sunday night you come home drunk; you have words with aunt; you push her out of your room. All this you admit?"

"Yes," said Philip again—quite loud.

"You are alone with her all night. Next morning she has disappeared. We leave the house together, and a few hours later the body is found in your trunk. This is a fact, at anyrate, whether you admit it or not."

Philip was silent again.

"And now you deny that you put it there. Yet you knew it *was* there, for your letter to me proves that."

"Austin," said Philip hoarsely, "I always used to love and honor you as an elder brother, and, as far as I can remember, with all my faults—God knows there are plenty of them!—I have never told a lie in my life. I swear to you that I *never* knew of Aunt Elizabeth's death till you came into this room this morning."

"Then," said Austin roughly, "why did you write me that letter to Paris?"

Again there was a pause; but at last Philip spoke out distinctly enough.

"I'd better tell you," he said, "what I remember. Of course, it's a little mixed up, you know. But—well, I suppose there's no chance for me with Edith in any case, Austin?"

"Of course not," cried Austin fiercely. "She's engaged to me. How dare you speak of it? Didn't Miss Simpkinson tell you so herself?"

"Yes, I know. Only a fellow sometimes thinks—well, after Mrs. Simpkinson told me, I resolved to break off with Lucy at the tobacconist's all the same. And I'd told her, and written to her too. And I'd had one or two letters from her, complaining—poor thing—and abusing me, you know. Very violent letters they were, too. And when I came in on Sunday night, my box was standing ready packed, to start next morning; and I had her last letter about me, with a—a portrait and a lock of hair she'd sent, poor thing, and I

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just threw the whole lot loose a-top of my box and shut the lid down; and I knew they were there, of course, and—well, you know, one wants to stand well with a woman, even if she don't marry you, and if Edith had opened my box, she'd have seen the whole lot of the trumpery at once, and guessed the whole thing. I'd rather die than have Edith think badly of me, Austin, because I—because she's going to be your wife, I suppose."

"A very likely story," said Austin, with a sneer. "I hope you'll get the police to believe it. I can't answer for Edith or myself. So, when you left Southend, your box was full of your books, was it, with those love letters and tokens lying a-top of them?"

"Yes, by—," cried Philip.

"And where, between Southend and Dover, did the old lady pop in?"

There was another silence.

"I will accept, for the sake of argument, that you believe your own version," said

Austin; "and now I will tell you the true one. But first answer one question. Why were you so anxious to know what had become of Aunt Elizabeth? Why were you in such a state about her?"

"I have already told you," said Philip, "I had had words with her. I had pushed her. It is very possible I hurt her. Next morning she was gone. I haven't seen her since, and the thought has been constantly worrying me that I may have injured her more than I thought."

"You probably did," said Austin grimly. "Now, listen to me. When you came home, you were angry with aunt, because you believed that, if she would but promise you a share of her money, Edith Simpkinson would marry you instead of me. You had words with the old lady, and, as you say, you pushed her—in reality, you struck her to the ground."

"No," interposed Philip, "I did not."

"You pushed her, and she fell. Do you deny that?"

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"I did not hear her fall. It was only
next morning that I realized it might have
been so."

"You are prevaricating, Philip," said
Austin, with great scorn.

But I was sure he was not. He was
only trying to discriminate, as carefully as
his hazy recollection would allow.

"You pushed her? There you say
your memory fails you. Let us go on.
When you found the old woman did not
get up again, you grew frightened. You
tried in vain to restore her to consciousness,
and ultimately, seeing it was no use, you
unpacked your box, and placed the dead
body in it, thinking to carry it away with
you and get rid of it somehow. The boxes
were interchanged at Charing Cross, and
the rest is clear enough."

"I don't remember," said Philip.

"Do you remember doing anything else
that night? Is any other explanation pos-
sible? Tell me, you who boast you never

told a lie—tell me, have you not often acted as in a dream in one of your drunken fits? Tell me, did you not take again of that hateful syrup of chloral on that very Sunday night? Tell me."

"I did," said Philip. "And you wouldn't be surprised, either, if you knew what sleeplessness means to a nervous man when he's drunk."

"And can you consider yourself responsible under those circumstances? Did not you yourself admit to me, only a week or two ago, that you saw things that weren't in the room, and did things you had forgotten next morning, when you took an overdose of chloral, and even when you didn't?"

Did Philip answer? I could not hear.

"I will tell you," Austin went on. "There was a man once who came into my room in a frenzy of fear, because two burglars had broken into the house, and one of them had wounded him with a knife.

The blood was pouring down his night-shirt, he said. I looked, but I could see nothing. I went into his room with him, but there was no one to be seen."

"Yes, yes!" screamed Philip. "I imagined things that were not, but I didn't forget things that were."

"Is there much difference? I know a man who told me one morning that he had been in bed and asleep all night, and yet I had seen him out in the garden picking roses in the moonlight."

"Stop, stop!" cried Philip.

"And we found the roses afterwards in another room."

Philip groaned aloud.

"Tell me this only," said Austin passionately. "The police are on us. The whole thing is being hunted down. Tell me one thing. What do you believe you did during that night?"

"After I had taken the chloral, I fell asleep."



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"And dreamed?"

"Yes."

"What did you dream?"

"I dreamed—oh, Austin—I don't remember. I dreamed that I was quarrelling with Aunt Elizabeth, I believe. But it's all very vague and uncertain, and I had a terrible headache next morning."

"And when I joined you, the key of your door was missing. Philip, do you remember where I found it?"

"Yes; in Aunt Elizabeth's room."

"Great heaven, what are you keeping back for? How can I save you? You will be captured here to-morrow—to-day, perhaps. The London detectives are working out the case. And you—you will not listen. You refuse to believe your own testimony. Fly, Philip, fly while you can. Once more, I will provide the money. Get away to some American State."

"Are they really on my track?" asked Philip, half starting up.

"On yours and Edith's. More than that, Edith is in prison. They suspect her of being an accomplice. Get away to some American State, and then write from there and exculpate her."

"Why did you not tell me all this in your letter?" cried Philip. "The letter explained nothing."

"Why did you refuse to see me yesterday?" answered Austin. "I should have told you everything then."

"And if I stay here?"

"You ruin both Edith and yourself. Philip, think what it means—the gallows. In your heart you know that you, and you alone, must have done this deed. I am willing to believe you have forgotten half—we will prove your irresponsibility—anything—but fly first."

"Merciful heaven, who else has done it if not I?" said Philip, in broken accents. "I must have done it—God forgive me."

"If you have unpacked your box," said

Austin slowly, "the books must be in the house at Southend. You see that?"

"Yes," said Philip anxiously.

"Do you remember unpacking it? You shake your head. Let us go, and, if we find the books are there, will that convince you?"

"You go, you go," said Philip.

"I will. I will leave you till to-morrow, because I fully believe we still have so much time before us, but to-morrow—mark me—you *must* leave England. We can have no convicted assassins in the family, Philip."

"Look for the books—the books," said Philip. His voice dropped into a murmur, and I could hear no more.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ASPECT CHANGES.

I COULD hear no more. In another moment Austin would be going. I slipped round and drew back the outer bolt. My views had very considerably changed since I first locked the brothers in, and my plans with them. I now intended to wait a little before I threatened Philip. It was certain, in any case, that he was not a deliberate murderer, and that the crime had taken place under very different circumstances from those which I had considered almost proven until now. I must have another talk with Philip.

Austin would come back for his overcoat to the room I had appropriated as mine. I went down to the one on the first floor, and waited till the clergyman passed my door.

He was barely out of the house when I ran up, opened the side-door, and stood, without any further warning, in the presence of Philip Harvey.

He was sitting on a low chair by the empty fireplace, with his head in his hands. He looked up as I came in, and started back with an expression of extreme terror on his face.

"Mr. Harvey," I said, "I am a private detective. I was watching your case. Last night I was rude to you. I apologize. Last night I believed you were a murderer; this morning I believe that, whatever you may be, you are not that. I am come to place myself at your disposal. This mystery must be unravelled. Let us unravel it together. Neither will succeed alone."

Philip Harvey muttered some unintelligible reply. I found it impossible at first to get anything out of him. He was profoundly distrustful, and looked upon me in the light of a detective and a natural enemy.

Very gradually I got him to believe that I was interested in his case on his own behalf, as indeed I was.

"You must tell me, in the first place," I said presently, as we sat by the hearth together, "what you know about your aunt's affairs. You said yesterday that her death was no advantage to you from a pecuniary point of view. Is that absolutely correct?"

"Absolutely," said Harvey; "all her money goes to Austin."

"Was she rich?"

"No. She had, I believe, some nine hundred pounds a year or so, and she left it all to Austin, as eldest."

"There never was any talk of her leaving anything to you, or of her disinheriting him?"

"Well," said Philip, "not seriously, I think. I suppose——" he checked himself.

"It is absolutely necessary for me to know everything," I said, "if I am to be of any assistance to you."

"My aunt did not like me as well as Austin. She disapproved of my wildness. I was not as good a boy as my brother, but lately she had espoused my cause in one matter. My brother and I were both fond of the same young lady. The lady's mother turned me out of doors, and chose my brother—he being heir to my aunt's small fortune. My aunt, who was a very shrewd old woman, got into her head that the young lady and I were better suited for each other, and that we, in fact, were really in love. She wished me to marry, and she had certainly often told Austin of late that she would change her will, and thus test the young lady's affection. As for the young lady herself, she believed I had forgotten her for unworthy rivals, when, in reality, I was seeking to drown my sorrow in dissipation. She turned to my brother. They were engaged, chiefly through her mother's influence. My aunt was very angry about it."

"When were they engaged?" I asked.

"Last week. At least, they were half engaged. My aunt, as I told you, did not approve of the match. She was an old maid, but she had very strict ideas about the holiness of the marriage vow."

"And so she wanted you to marry the young lady?"

"I believe so."

"In spite of all your misdoings?"

"She thought the girl would have been the making of me, and—damn it—I believe she would."

"So when it comes to it," I said, "there was absolutely no reason why you should wish to shorten your aunt's days? On the contrary, you lose by her death?"

"Oh, yes. One could almost always wheedle something out of her—at least I could. Austin won't be so easily imposed on."

"And yet you threatened her!"

"Oh, that was never intended to be taken in earnest. Sometimes, when she

preached me long sermons, I used to get into a great rage. Once I said to the young lady my brother is engaged to, that I would do my aunt a mischief."

"And the young lady heard that? Ah, that explains a good deal."

"You mean to tell me," said Philip bitterly, "that, when the discovery was made, she at once jumped to the conclusion that I had carried out my threat? Ay, so my brother says."

"You can hardly call it jumping at a conclusion," I remarked severely; "what else could she—what else can any one—think?"

"True," said Philip, with a groan; "I must have done it. Not that I ever intended to, but I certainly quarrelled with her on that wretched night. I must have done it, as Austin says. He is to go and find the books. If he finds the books, the thing's evident. I've done it. I shall give it up."

He was talking more to himself than to me, but by this time I had got into his confidence. He was so utterly miserable and forlorn.

What he said now quite fitted into my modified theory of the murder. I had had time to think of it, and I knew what I knew. It was evident to me that I had been right from the first. Philip Harvey was the man who had done the deed, and Philip Harvey alone. And yet, could he be said to have done it? I believed implicitly in his good faith. There was no room for a denial of it. It was evident, then, that he must have committed his crime while in a state of delusion, caused by the action of the chloral on a brain already heated by drink. I saw nothing impossible in this explanation, although, of course, it was out of the common. I had had large experience of the various kinds of drunkenness, and knew what very extraordinary phases can be produced when it finds a nervous or highly imaginative temperament to work on. I had also come

across a case of what must have been irregular function of the brain produced by chloral, and I had seen a man commit actions in that condition, of which he could render no account on the ensuing day. I could, therefore, accept Austin Harvey's theory, especially after his account of former similar experiences in his brother's life. It furnished the only satisfactory explanation of what seemed otherwise an incomprehensible difficulty. On the one hand, I fully believed that Philip had killed his aunt. On the other hand, I fully believed that he was unconscious of having done it. Some explanation must be forthcoming, and this seemed a perfectly plausible one.

But, at the same time, I felt that no English jury would be got to take this view of the case. With a French jury, the man would have had a fair chance. They would have put Charcot into the witness-box. Now, the French of to-day will believe any psychological marvel that Charcot

swears to; and for Charcot, who has so cleverly appropriated, and scientifically legalized, all the mesmeric and magnetic "quackeries" that no doctor believed in till a doctor had stamped them—for Charcot there are no marvels in the field of psychology. It is the impossible which is always happening. But no twelve sturdy, matter-of-fact Englishmen would ever be got to believe that a man might commit a murder and not remember he had done it. Besides, did not Philip foolishly and honestly admit that he remembered having words with his aunt, and pushing her out of the room? Was he in the habit of pushing her? No, he had never dared to touch her in his life before.

I felt that Austin was right. The best thing the man could do was to escape across the ocean. That morning early my mind had been quite made up to have him arrested immediately. I had given up all idea of blackmailing the family, and had

intended to cover myself with glory by publishing my own investigation of the case to the authorities and to the world. I resolved now, not without a severe pang, to give all that up also. I somehow felt attracted to the unfortunate assassin, drunken and dissolute though he was ; or rather, I felt a kind of chivalrous longing that the guilty man should not be punished beyond the limits of his guilt. I would do my best to save him, and the family must acknowledge my services afterwards as would be thought fit by both parties.

"I can satisfy your doubt about the books," I said. "They are there. I have seen them with my own eyes. A cupboard in your dead aunt's room is full of them."

I had hardly expected that this bit of information would upset Philip as much as it did. His agitation proved to me how hard he was clinging to the idea of his possible innocence, and how unwilling he was to admit his brother's theory of the murder.

"It's all up, then," he stammered.
"Austin's right. I must get away."

He stumbled to his feet. Great beads of perspiration stood out upon his forehead.

"Not now," I said. "Where are you going? Wait for your brother's return."

He was near the door already, feeling his way like a man in the dark. Suddenly he stopped.

"But will my going throw the blame on Edith?" he asked. "I'd rather swing a hundred times than do a hurt to Edith."

"Miss Simpkinson is safe," I said. "They can bring no real evidence against her. And you can exculpate her as soon as you are on the other side. But you can't get away at this moment. The day-boat is gone. Start for Calais this evening, then get down to Marseilles, and from thence try to reach one of the South American republics, as your brother suggests."

"He won't do it," I said to myself, with

a sigh. "If the Government detectives are only half alive, he'll never do it."

He allowed me to lead him back to his chair. He was utterly broken and miserable. He asked me to ring for some brandy, but this I refused to do.

"You'll want all your nerve," I said; "and, whatever you may fancy, you don't get nerve from brandy. Let's sit down and talk the matter over. You have ten hours yet before you start, and the quieter you keep in this room meanwhile, the better."

Thus I found myself unexpectedly turned into an ally of the very man whom I had been hunting down for the last four days. I began to feel quite an interest in his chances of escape. I could not deny to myself that they were very small.

"We *must* get you away," I said, "and you must help us all you can."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE LATCH-KEY.

AND so we sat on, waiting for the evening,—it was barely mid-day as yet,—and talking of the murder. We could not help talking of it. I started another subject every now and then, but we always reverted to the murder.

I learned from Philip Harvey that his relations with his aunt had been of a very unequal character. When she was angry with him, she was very angry; and when she was fond, she was very fond. She must have been a violent, ill-tempered woman, and I suspect that, in reality, and at the bottom of her heart, she had had a sneaking preference for the prodigal, good-for-nothing nephew, while she lavished her righteous approval on the respectable and

sanctimonious one. It appeared to me that Philip had also not been without a certain liking for the stiff-necked, stingy old lady. He had certainly succeeded during her life-time in extracting considerable sums out of her closely-shut purse; and I now learned, for the first time, that she had used the possible inheritance as a continual incitement and excitement at every step her nephews took. She alternated in her promises of favor, using them as so many means to make the two young men do exactly as she might think fit. It was, "I shall leave my money to Philip, unless you," etc., and, "If you wish Austin to have every penny, then, Philip," etc., sometimes as often as half-a-dozen times a week. It was a dangerous game to play, and the end had been—murder!

There had always been some tacit understanding, all the same, that Austin, the eldest, was to come into the money, and this had proved to be correct. In fact, the

proof had been given shortly before old Miss Raynell's death, for, when Austin applied for Edith's hand in marriage, Mrs. Orr-Simpkinson, who, with all her nervousness and fussiness, was evidently a sharp enough woman of business, had allowed her answer to depend altogether on the certainty and satisfactoriness of the suitor's financial prospects. She would probably have accepted Philip if Philip had been Miss Raynell's heir; but a preparatory flirtation between that gentleman and Edith had come to an abrupt and violent conclusion a day or two before the young lady accepted Austin. Mrs. Simpkinson had an interview with Miss Raynell, in which the spinster, bullied or cajoled in some way or other, was forced to confess (on paper) that Austin was her heir. It appeared that this was actually the case in accordance with her last will. She had made several wills.

"I believe the poor old girl repented afterwards," said Philip, pulling away at his

pipe. "All the more so, for having been humbugged by Mrs. Simpkinson. She couldn't bear being humbugged. She wanted me, I fancy— Well, never mind. She used to talk threateningly about having her own way in the end."

"She did, did she?" said I.

"Indeed she did. But whatever my aunt's way may have been, Mrs. Simpkinson has had hers, damn it."

We sank into another spell of silent smoking after this, as we were constantly doing. My thoughts reverted to my visit to the trunk-makers, and once more I asked myself whether the proofs were sufficient that the box in Paris was Philip Harvey's?

"How is it, Mr. Harvey," I asked, "that the makers are not able to verify your purchase of one of their boxes from them?"

"Oh, that is very simple," answered Philip. "I had seen an advertisement of theirs, and as it described just the kind of

thing I wanted, I looked in one day when I was in their neighborhood, and bought a box. I paid for it at the time, and took it away on a cab."

"When was that?" I asked; "and where did you take it to?"

"Some two months ago. I drove straight down to Greenwich, where I had—and still have—my lodgings."

"A long drive," I said. My profession had naturally made me suspicious.

"Yes, but I had been getting a number of things, and I took them all down together."

"And how often have you traveled with your box since?"

"Only twice. Once from Greenwich down to Southend, and then on last Monday morning from Southend to Dover—as I thought. When I got here, I found my key would not open the box I had with me. I thought something had gone wrong with the lock. I had it broken open; it

was full of photographic apparatus, which I at once recognized as Miss Simpkinson's property. I had a new lock put in, and forwarded the box to Miss Simpkinson next morning. I wrote and telegraphed to my brother. I thought at once that the boxes must have been exchanged. I knew Miss Simpkinson had one exactly like mine, because I had advised her to get it. I was most anxious she should not see some—some papers and things I had in my box. But I swear to you that I had no idea at the time that I had killed my aunt. I must have been mad."

"Why, then, were you so much agitated when I first mentioned her name to you?"

"I—I had a haunting fear about me that I might have hurt her. I didn't remember clearly, you see. I knew I had struck her, and I had heard nothing of her since that night."

"And you believe now that you killed her?" He shuddered.

"How can I help believing it?" he whispered. "Austin says I did it. You say I did it. And the books are there to prove it."

"No one but you can have gained access to the house on Sunday night except the landlady? No one had a latch-key?"

"No," said Philip.

"Miss Raynell had one. The landlady told me so."

"Yes, that is true. She liked to go out in the morning, before any one was up. And she used sometimes to let me have it of nights."

"Where was that key on Sunday night?"

"I had it," said Philip.

"But you rang the front-door bell on coming home?"

"Yes. To tell the truth, I was too—too elevated to remember I had the key."

"But are you *sure* you had it with you?"

"Sure? I took it out of my watch-pocket next morning, where I always keep it."

This baffled me.

"And are you sure that no one could have penetrated into the house? Was there a chain across the front door?"

"No; there was no chain, but the door was double-locked. What I call the latch-key was, in fact, just simply the door-key. There was no latch-key."

"Humph!" I said. "Then you left the house in the morning with your aunt's dead body packed in the trunk. You are sure, of course, that you did not look into your box in the morning after waking?"

"Quite sure. I wished to open it, and I looked everywhere for the key, and could not find it. Ultimately Austin found it."

"And where did Austin find it?"

"In my aunt's room," said Philip, almost in a whisper. "Why deny it? My guilt is sure."

"Your guilt is sure," I repeated, "as far as it goes. You left Southend, then, with the box? You met the Simpkinsons in London, and you, your brother Austin, Miss Simpkinson, her mother, and all your luggage, including the two boxes, traveled down to Dover together from Charing Cross? Is that so?"

"No. Austin took us to the station only. The three of us started together. The Simpkinsons and their luggage were booked through to Paris. I was only going to Dover for a week's fresh air."

"And you remember packing the books in your box?"

"Yes. I had put them in on Saturday. I had left the box unlocked. I lifted the lid on Sunday night to throw in some letters, and I saw the books untouched. I then locked the box and corded it."

"What! You corded it on the Sunday night?"

"Yes; I managed to do that somehow

or other. I was very anxious no one should see the letters I had put in."

"You are not a left-handed man, Mr. Harvey?"

"No. Why do you ask?"

"Who saw to the luggage at Charing Cross?"

"I did. But there was a great hurry and confusion. We were late. The boxes were thrown in anyhow. There might easily have been a mistake."

"Why, and when, did you put that 'P. H.' on your box?"

Philip Harvey looked at me in surprise.

"I never put any 'P. H.' on my box," he said. "It was not marked at all. That accounts for the confusion."

"You wrote P. H. on the luggage-label. Is that also one of the things you did in a trance that night, I wonder?"

"I certainly never did it consciously," said Philip; "but I no longer know what I have done or not done. I hardly know whether I am I."

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THE BLACK-BOX MURDER.

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I went downstairs to my room and got my fac-simile of the letters on Philip's box, as also his card to Miss Simpkinson, his letter to his brother, and his brother's letter to me. I brought them all down together.

CHAPTER XX.

"P. H."

I DREW a table up before Philip, and spread out before him my copy of his initials.

"Do you recognize those letters," I said, "as similar to such as you would make?"

"Yes," he answered: "they are my handwriting. What of that?"

"They are your handwriting," I said, "and they are on your black box in Paris."

I unfolded the letter and the card, and once more compared them. I was not sorry for the break this scrutiny made in a conversation sufficiently difficult to keep up. I sat examining the various letters with a minuteness engendered by the want of something better to do. All of a sudden I broke out into an impetuous exclamation.

Philip, and spread his initials. "Have you letters," I said, "they would make?" "they are my letters," I said, "the black box in Paris." "and the card, and them. I was not scrupulous made in a difficult to keep the various letters covered by the want All of a sudden a sudden exclamation.

I could not help it. I seized my companion's arm and shook it eagerly.

"Have you paper in this room?" I said.

"Ink? Get them. Quick!"

"What do you mean?" asked Philip dazedly.

"Don't ask. Get them. Is that an inkstand? That's right. Now, write down your initials fifty times in succession, without stopping to take breath."

With a wondering look Philip obeyed. He spread out the letters across a great sheet of paper. I watched him breathlessly. I steadied myself against his chair as he threw off line after line. This new idea of mine might be worth nothing at its best, but, if the writer's hand swerved only once, it was lost altogether. At last the fiftieth signature was reached. I drew a long breath. I caught up the paper, and once more scanned it eagerly. I compared it with the letter and the card. I compared it with my copy of the luggage-label.


There could be no doubt that I had seen correctly.

The letters on the luggage-label were very similar to those made by Philip Harvey, but they were not exactly like them.

In the case of these letters the first stroke was drawn past the down stroke so as to form a blind loop in this manner,—

A handwritten sample of the letters 'P' and 'H'. The 'P' has a large, elegant loop that goes around the vertical downstroke of the 'H' before returning to the top of the 'P'.

In all Philip Harvey's P's and H's, this flourish stopped short of the down stroke thus,—

A handwritten sample of the letters 'P' and 'H'. The 'P' has a loop that is much smaller and less integrated with the 'H' than in the previous sample, appearing to stop just before the downstroke of the 'H'.

The difference, slight as it may appear, was there. Had Philip *once* drawn his stroke through and back again, I should, of course, have had nothing to say, but I

had first noticed the peculiarity in the "H" of "How jolly" on the card, then I had turned to the letter and found it repeated there, and now I had before me fifty P H's, not one of which showed the loop. It was almost incredible that a man who had so accustomed himself to making the letters of his name with one unalterable movement of the pen, should deviate from his rule in a solitary instance. I laid down the paper.

"That 'P.H.' on your box," I said, "was not made by you. This would not matter much in itself, but it was made by some one *who purposely imitated your handwriting*. That matters more."

Philip did not care to attach much importance to this discovery. He was too broken-hearted at the thought of his guilt.

"Are you sure," I asked, "that those letters were not on your box before Sunday night? Think clearly. It may be of the greatest importance."

Philip hesitated a little. Presently he said,—

"I am quite sure. More than that, now I think of it, I am quite sure they were not on the box when I started from Southend on Monday morning. I distinctly remember seeing the old 'Greenwich' label, and wishing I had removed it. I should have noticed if there were letters on it. How were they made?"

"They had been hurriedly drawn on the label. They were rather thick, and must have been plainly visible before the Paris paper was pasted over them. The paste very much obliterated the pencil marks, and at present they are rather faint."

"They were not there," said Philip, "when I left Southend."

"The conclusion is this," I replied: "Some one has thought it worth his while to mark your box on Monday morning with the initials of your name in conscious imitation of your handwriting. It was that person's aim that the box should be recognized as yours. He had not realized the possibility of the porters at the station

sticking the new label over the old one. This, however, they actually did. Philip Harvey, that person, whoever he may be, knew of the contents of the black box."

Philip Harvey continued to stare stupidly at me.

"I have always fancied," I continued, "from the very first that the correct clue would start from these two letters on the luggage-label which I discovered on that Monday evening in the police-station. Perhaps it is a superstition, but there the idea is. Perhaps it will prove correct, after all. I begin to doubt more and more whether the story of this murder is as simple as we have always believed it. I begin to doubt whether you, Philip Harvey, are really the murderer. My first duty," I said, after a painful pause, "is now to go back to Paris, and once more closely examine the letters on the box. I am not enough of an expert; I shall have to consult one. I shall accompany you to-night." •

"It is a very vague supposition to go on," said Philip.

"I do not think so," I answered. "Some one must have traced those letters, probably between Southend and Dover. That some one knew all about the murder. We must find out who he is."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE BOX AGAIN.

THAT evening we crossed.

We had not been able to wait for Austin's return. Something must have kept him, for, when the moment came, he was not there. I decided that it would be unwise to wait any longer. The police might be down on Philip Harvey at any moment, and so I persuaded him to come away with me that very night. I myself was now entirely upset and nonplussed. From the very first I had fastened my suspicions on the "P. H.," who had turned out to be Philip Harvey, and I had left no room for a doubt. Now I began to ask myself whether I had not been mistaken all along. I began to believe that, possibly, Philip Harvey might be altogether innocent, and

I had absolutely no one to take his place.

I sat stupidly staring at the letters I had in my possession, or at the luggage-label I had that morning taken out of Austin Harvey's overcoat. How did that particular label come in that particular place? What did it matter? The question still remained, —Who was the murderer? And after a week's hard work and seeming complete success, that question seemed further than ever removed from a satisfactory conclusion. We had a terrible journey. Philip was nervous, and saw spies and detectives everywhere. I found it as much as I could manage to keep him from betraying himself a dozen times over to a number of perfectly innocent people, who would have been much at a loss what to do with their unexpected capture. I felt confident, from what I saw, that he was not yet under any supervision, and my only anxiety was lest he should himself facilitate the work of the blood-hounds who must be already on his track.

I was most anxious to get him out of the country, for I could not help confessing that, although I personally was beginning to doubt his guilt, all the indications against him still remained in full force. And then I suddenly asked myself whether, perhaps, after all, I was helping the real murderer to escape? Altogether, I felt completely at a loss.

At Paris, we agreed he was to have twenty-four hours' rest, and to wait for his brother, for whom he had left a discreetly-worded note at the Dover hostelry. The only question was, would Austin come over on the Sunday? I may add that, to be ready for subsequent inquiries, Philip had taken a ticket for London at the Dover station, while I had asked for the two Paris tickets, and registered all the luggage—not much—as if it were mine.

When we reached Paris, we immediately drove to a quiet, out-of-the-way hotel, Philip with many anxieties and sudden shrinkings

into dark passages and cab-corners. All the bluster had gone out of him. He was terribly impressed by the idea of the murder. He quite believed, as far as I could make out, that he had done it in the way described by Austin, and he kept muttering to himself, "The books! the books!" It was evident that he considered the discovery of the books in his aunt's cupboard as the strongest proof of his guilt. They proved, more than anything else, that he did not remember what he had been doing; that he had acted under the influence of delusion on that Sunday night.

"Nonsense," said I. "They seem to prove, and a good many things seem to prove, that the murder was committed that night in the house, and that the corpse was packed away into your box *in* the house. That's all."

"But there was no one in the house all night except we two and the landlady. You don't think the landlady killed her?"

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"Hardly," I said.

"Well, there was no one else in the house. There could not have been."

"That remains to be proved," said I.

It was Sunday morning—a warm, beautiful morning. As soon as I had deposited my charge in comparative safety, I went in search of my old friend, Léon Dubert. It was almost a week since I had seen him. How much had happened in that time!

I found him in his office, for it was almost ten o'clock when I got there. Of course he was delighted to see me. Frenchmen always are delighted to see you, even when they have made up their minds never on any account to see you again. For all that, I think he rather wished I would leave off meddling with the black-box tragedy. I believe he considered my behavior unprofessional.

"But, my dear Monsieur Dubert," I said, "how far are you? Have you caught the man?"

"It is no affair of mine," he answered petulantly. "You had better ask François. Your countrymen are busy with it. They consider themselves wonderfully intelligent, I believe."

"International rivalries," I said to myself. "So much the better for Harvey."

I gained permission, through François Dubert, to see the black box again. I told him frankly that I thought I had an important clue. I trembled with expectation as the commissary fumbled about the door of the room where the box was kept. Supposing I had been mistaken? Supposing I had taken my copy accurately, no doubt, yet not sufficiently accurately to preclude so slight an alteration? It was such a little thing. I rushed forward as soon as the door was opened. There stood the fateful box, black and grim, with its hideous unknown story. Fortunately no one had touched it. It had been photographed, that was all. The "Greenwich to South-

end" label was turned towards me. I examined it closely. Faint as the pencilled letters upon it were, there would be no mistaking their shape. They had originally been deeply marked with a soft lead pencil—

PH

I had copied them correctly. The loop was there.

I carefully scrutinized the box once more. I could find nothing of any special interest. But looking now by daylight—bright, sunny daylight—I found a shiny place, from which another label, insufficiently attached, might have dropped or been torn away. There was, I found, on wetting my finger, a slight stickiness still. That settled the matter. A luggage-label had been affixed at South-end. It had either dropped off or been torn off before the box reached Paris. In all probability it had been torn off. If this

was the case, the occurrence would probably have taken place before the box left London. One of my reasons for thinking this was as follow. I give it for what it was worth :—

The porter who had stuck on the "London to Paris" label had neatly covered up the old "Greenwich to Southend" one. He was, then, a most unusual porter, who made a point of tidiness and accuracy in these matters. If there had been another old label on the box at the time, he would probably have covered that up also, instead of sticking the great "P" label on a fresh place. I presumed, then, that there was no other labels on the box. The argument was not valuable. I did not consider it so. It sufficed, with the natural probability, to allow me to presume that the label had been torn off before the box left London. I had found a label marked "Southend to London," pushed down and forgotten in Austin Harvey's coat-pocket. It was the very label that was missing.

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Austin Harvey had accompanied the others to the railway station at Charing Cross, and there taken leave of them. Was it he who had torn off the label? And if he had done this, was it he who had marked the letters "P. H." on Philip's box? If so, why had he done it?

I hurriedly took from my pocket-book the letter which Austin Harvey had written me. I went with it to the full light of the window. The letters were made altogether differently from those on the box. There was a capital H in it, which looked more like a printed letter. It was formed thus,



There were loops everywhere,

but *not a single blind one.*

I got an expert, through François Du-
bert's assistance, and the letters were sub-
mitted to him. I do not much believe in
experts in handwriting. Three of them
always disagree, and they are, none the
less, always most obstinate in their opinions
—just like doctors.

This man—a Frenchman, of course—had only the two letters to go by. He declared, none the less, most positively, that they were not written by Philip Harvey. The graphological difference between the twisted loop and the straight stroke was far too great to render this doubtful. He declared also—perhaps a shade less positively—that they had not been written by Austin Harvey, because Austin Harvey never made a blind loop. He considered this even of more importance than the entire difference of shape.

I paid the man, with considerable disgust, and started off to see whether I could get admitted to Miss Simpkinson.

CHAPTER XXII.

MISS SIMPKINSON'S OPINION.

THE police had not been able to retain Miss Simpkinson in close confinement. No new accusations had been brought forward against her, and the arrival of her own box, which had been sent on by Philip from Dover, had sufficiently proved the truth of the explanations which her maid had propounded from the first. The London detectives had, of course, set themselves to discover the person who had forwarded the box from Dover, and nothing would have been easier had they not been hampered from the first, and sent on a wrong track by the people at Dover Station. Mrs. Simpkinson had remained for four days in a state of such nervous

exhaustion that the doctors had forbidden her being examined during that time.

I could not help smiling malignantly when I heard that the authorities were pursuing a bald-headed old gentleman in a white waistcoat, who was to land at New York on Saturday. This was the fault of the Dover people. I now saw what an advantage it had been to me all along that Philip Harvey's name did not occur on the books of the makers of the box. Still, the delay could only be a question of a few days. Had the Government officials been shrewd, they would have been aware half a week ago that Philip Harvey had slept in the house with his aunt the night she was murdered. As a fact, I found afterwards they did know—just too late. They turned up at the "Saracen's Head" the day after we had left it, and then hurried back to Philip's London lodgings. Mrs. Simpkinson, namely, was examined on Saturday afternoon, and she immediately

denounced Philip Harvey as the probable murderer.

One thing I learned in Paris with considerable surprise. It was that Austin Harvey, who had been so frank in his conduct towards me, had observed a most hampering reticence in his relations with the authorities. They had drawn very little out of him, and that little had required an immense amount of drawing. They believed, as François told me, that Austin really knew very little about the matter. Said the commissary to me,—

“He is foreign to the whole intrigue.”

It appeared to me, judging from what I saw, as if Austin had, for some reason or other, wished me to know as much as possible about the whole matter, while he strove to keep the Government detectives in the dark. But what reason could he have for such an extraordinary course of action?

The French police had allowed Miss Simpkinson to leave the “pension,” where

I had first found her, and to take up her quarters with her mother in a quiet little hotel between the Madeleine and the Parc Monceau. Mrs. Simpkinson had been moved in on Friday night. The British Embassy had remained surety for the good behavior of the prisoners, and they had expressly undertaken not to leave Paris. It was in this hotel that I found Miss Simpkinson, access having been gained with very little difficulty. I was startled by the first look at her face. She had evidently suffered much during the last terrible week. And no wonder. Whether she still cared for Philip, or whether she had only played with him before she chose his brother—in any case, her position was a truly frightful one. She was engaged to be married to Austin, and there was murder in the family. Had she ever loved Philip? He evidently believed she had. And if so, why had she accepted Austin? She was not a woman to let herself be influenced to such an extent, even by her own mother.

On the other hand, she was a woman who could do almost anything from a caprice of offended pride. I trusted to this interview for obtaining an elucidation of some of my difficulties.

She had a haunted look in her dark eyes, but she asked me to be seated with a certain air of not undignified reserve. Poor girl! She must have been consumed with anxiety to know what I had to tell. And yet she seemed too proud to put a question. A woman of infinite possibilities.

"I am here," I said, as I sat down, "with Philip Harvey, Miss Simpkinson."

"Indeed!" said Miss Simpkinson, smoothing her dress down. "And what has Mr. Harvey come to Paris for?"

"He has come to Paris because he is flying from England."

"Why is he flying?" said Miss Simpkinson. "And where is he flying to?"

"Let me take the last question first. He hopes to reach Marseilles to-morrow

morning, and from thence to get away to some American State. In that case——"

"Will he do it?" cried Miss Simpkinson, starting out of her reserve

"I hope so. I expect so."

"Thank God!" said Miss Simpkinson, and sank back into her reserve again.

"Still, I must admit that nothing can be said with certainty. To tell the truth, my dear lady, the police ought to have caught him two or three days ago. Now they have not done so, nothing can be affirmed with certainty."

"Let us hope he will succeed" said Miss Simpkinson.

I saw we should get no further with all this fencing. Besides, it is a thing I detest. I attribute my success in the one or two cases I have managed, largely to my habit of going straight at the mark.

"Amen to that," I said coolly. "It's Paraguay or the gallows!"

Miss Simpkinson grew very pale, but said nothing.

"And that's all the more awful," I went on, "because I fancy he's innocent."

This brought her round. She sprang up, her eyes ablaze with mingled hope and fear.

"Innocent!" she shrieked. "How so? What do you mean? I would give all I possess to know him innocent!"

I did not answer her straightway.

"Do you then, also," I said, "believe him guilty?"

"How can I help it?" she burst out. "Whatever my heart may say, my reason follows proof. Are not all the facts against him? Is his crime not as good as proved? Who did it, if not he? Would any jury acquit him?"

"I fear not," I said—Miss Simpkinson winced—"yet I tell myself he is innocent all the same."

"And your proofs?" said Miss Simpkinson. Of course she was yearning to have them. "Whom do you suspect?" she asked.

"Let me ask you a question first," I said. "Upon your soul and honor, by all that you hold most sacred, do you suspect any one?"

"No," she said, in surprise; "unless it be Philip. My heart rebels against the thought, but my brain just simply proves it's Philip."

We had got much more confidential already, you see. I believed in her good faith. I was very sorry to see she could give me no assistance.

"Excuse my seeming indiscretion," I said, "but it would be of the greatest importance to me if you could briefly inform me what led to your rupture with Philip Harvey, and your subsequent engagement to his brother."

Miss Simpkinson blushed scarlet.

"I was never engaged to Philip Harvey," she said. "It is impossible that you should ever have heard such a story. I must beg you to change the subject."

Too strong-willed to show her emotion, Miss Simpkinson shaded her eyes with her hand. The hand trembled. It was vain to attempt to get much out of Miss Simpkinson. Nevertheless, before I left her, she had betrayed to me what I wanted to know. She loved Philip Harvey, and therefore, presumably, did not care for Austin. How incomprehensible these women are! Combining this discovery with what Philip had admitted, I thought I began to understand. Doubtless Miss Simpkinson, offended in her deepest and truest instincts by some infidelity of her scapegrace lover's, had avenged herself upon him by publicly accepting his brother. Her mother's continued pressure may have facilitated—it would never have prompted the step. Headstrong and passionate as the girl was, I could well understand her resentment thus precipitating her into fresh misfortune. I did not believe she wanted to marry Austin. I still less believed his small fortune would ever have tempted her.

I could not help wondering whether he had been able in any way to determine her behavior.

"I believe Philip is innocent," repeated on leaving; "but, as yet, I have no man to take his place. My suspicions are of the vaguest."

Suddenly I drew the copy of the letters "P. H." from my pocket.

"Is that Philip Harvey's handwriting?" I asked; "or is it Austin's?"

"How can I judge from two letters?" said Miss Simpkinson immediately. "It is absurd to expect me to. I should say that the shape of the letters was *o*'s, but that the character of the writing was decidedly Austin's."

CHAPTER XXIII.

A FRESH TRACK.

MISS SIMPKINSON had expressed a desire to see Philip. She would probably have penetrated into his presence had she known where to find him. As this would almost certainly have meant his immediate arrest, I was careful to keep her in ignorance, and, fortunately for us all, Philip himself too fully realized the danger of his position to remonstrate after I had explained to him that it could not be. He really was not such a bad fellow, was Philip, and I began to be heartily sorry for him.

I returned to my hotel with all possible precautions. There was now nothing more to be done. I had attained the object for which I had come to Paris. My fac-simile had proved correct; the distinction was there; the letters on the box had not been traced by Philip Harvey.

There was no denying it. And, incredible as the thing might seem, once admit that the writing was not Philip's, and circumstances—my own reasoning, Miss Simpkinson's momentous testimony—all seemed inevitably to point to the conclusion that it must be Austin's. The expert had said it was not; but I did not think much of the expert. For the moment, then, there was nothing to be done but to get Philip away to Marseilles. Austin came over in the afternoon,—Sunday afternoon though it was,—ignoring, in the all-engrossing excitement of the moment, every decency of Sabbath observance. He joined us at our hotel. He could only confirm my statement that the cupboard in his dead aunt's room was full of Philip's books—the very books which Philip declared he had packed in his box on Saturday. Even the love-letters and tokens had been found there. Austin produced them as a proof of his veracity, and held them out to his brother. Never,

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till I saw Philip's face at that moment, had I realized to what extent a man can hope against hope. We took the poor fellow to the Gare de Lyon, and saw him start with the *Rapide*. Austin had provided him with the sum of one hundred pounds, and had promised to let him have two hundred more upon his arrival at Monte Video. We had decided on the Argentine Republic. As the train was beginning to glide out of the big station, Philip leaned forward out of the carriage window.

"Austin," he said, "I half wonder—I—Austin, do you really believe I did it?"

Austin Harvey burst into tears. No other word was spoken. The train passed onward out of reach. I got Austin away from the crowd of curious spectators as quickly as possible.

"*Pauvre ami!*" I heard one gentleman say. "His brother, no doubt."

As we drove towards the Northern Station—for we were to start for England immediately with the night mail—I asked

whether the police had actually not yet taken possession of the house in Marine Parade, where the murder must have been committed.

"Oh, yes," said Austin; "it appears they have been inquiring there yesterday. A man was watching the house as I came out."

"He will be arrested at Marseilles," I said.

Austin turned pale and clutched my arm.

"You don't mean it?" he cried. "You can't mean it." He burst into tears afresh. He was dreadfully unnerved.

When we reached the station, he declared his intention of getting the tickets for us both. He went to the booking-office and asked for them. I stood watching him for want of something better to do, and because, since that morning, I felt a new interest in Austin Harvey. I saw him take out his pocket-book; I saw him pay the money; I saw him gather up the tickets and the

change. And he did all this with his left hand. He was not an invariably left-handed man, of that I am quite certain; but now I saw him with my own eyes use his left hand instead of his right. From that moment I felt that, in spite of all seeming contradictions and impossibilities, Austin Harvey would prove to be the murderer.

CHAPTER XXIV.

POOR LUCY'S EVIDENCE.

AT Charing Cross we parted. Austin was going back to his parochial work : his rector had, unwillingly enough, done without him on the Sunday already. I was to wait in London for news of Philip's embarkment.

"There is no extradition treaty, you know," Austin had said to me as we steamed on through the Kent hop-gardens. "As soon as we know he is safe, we will give the story to the world, with all its extenuating circumstances. It is barely manslaughter. And far better to tell the simple truth than to try in vain to keep it back."

"The police will save you all trouble on that score," I answered. "They will accuse your brother publicly long before he gets to Monte Video."

"If you think that, what are we to do?" said Austin.

I did not answer him. What to do, indeed! It was the question I was asking myself unceasingly. The more I watched my man, the more I saw that he was only very partially left handed. The peculiarity was evidently but the remnant of a boyish habit, which the man had almost entirely overcome. It came out again under the influence of excitement. This accounted for my not having noticed it on the few occasions when we had been thrown together. We parted, as I have said, at Charing Cross, and I went home to my lodgings. I could do nothing at present, and yet I felt that I must not rest till I had got at the truth. How *could* Austin Harvey have killed his aunt? When? Where? Had it not been proved beyond all doubt that Miss Raynell and Philip had slept in the house on that Sunday night, and that the box with the dead body had passed out of it on the Monday morning? Austin had

called for his brother before breakfast ; but it was quite certain that at that hour the murder had already been committed. The mystery seemed greater than ever. I began almost to despair of ever seeing it satisfactorily cleared up.

I worked it out for myself, nevertheless, doggedly, getting as far as I could.

It was not my fault if I had gone wrong from the first. All the circumstantial evidence had closed in upon Philip. There was not a soul on earth, not Philip himself, not Miss Simpkinson—least of all the authorities—who in any way suspected the clergyman. There had been—there still were—no reasons for suspecting him. And had I sufficient reason even now ?

It would not be gainsaid that, if Austin Harvey had really murdered his aunt, he must be one of the most consummate actors and unmitigated scoundrels in the three kingdoms. For it was evident that he had labored hard to convince both Philip and myself that Philip was the guilty man. He

had patiently striven to instil into his brother's drink-fuddled brain the theory of an unintentional and almost unconscious crime; and, with circumstances and past experiences helping him to a large extent, he had found the task a comparatively easy one. I could understand the way in which he had played upon Philip, but I could not understand as yet how he had found an opportunity of committing the crime. About the motive, which had remained such a puzzle in Philip's case, there was no difficulty here. Austin must have had reason to fear that his aunt would definitely make arrangements to bring about a match between his brother and Edith. The theory that Philip should have killed the old lady in anger had never quite satisfied me. But a clergyman! And such a charming, frank-mannered fellow, with his bright eyes and kindly voice. I felt that I must have irresistible evidence before I could convince even myself that I was not on the wrong track again. On the other hand, I felt

equally strongly that, if the charge was true, the villain must not escape me. Never had craven wretch a truer claim on the gallows. I must find out where Austin Harvey had been all through that Sunday night. I *must* prove an *alibi*. Nothing ought to be easier, if he was innocent. Till I had settled that, I could neither rest nor sleep.

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I determined to start for Southend immediately. I had got into London at 6 A.M., and thrown myself on my bed for a couple of hours. I started up again. By ten I was on my way to the little town. I telegraphed to Austin Harvey, saying I should be with him at five. That would leave me several hours free to start with. I was afraid of meeting him unawares in the streets, and arousing his suspicions, if I did not let him know.

As soon as I had sent my telegram, I felt that I had done a stupid thing. I

recount this little incident, because I am anxious to describe everything exactly as it occurred. I realized that, if I was to find out anything in Southend, my investigations must start from the house where Austin lived, and I must find out what I could about and from his immediate surroundings. To do so it was desirable that he should be called away from the spot rather than put on his guard and requested to remain there. I immediately sent a second telegram, begging him to come up to London on important business, and bidding him wait in my rooms, in case of my absence, till ten o'clock at night.

By ten o'clock I did not doubt I should have important business to transact with him. I got out at an intermediate station, looked up the time-table, and waited till the train had passed which might fairly be presumed to be bearing Austin up to London. Then I got into the next down train. It was three o'clock by the time I reached Southend.

Nothing was easier than to find out the address of the curate of St. Mary the Virgin's. The first porter at the station showed me the church, and from the church I was immediately directed to the parson. It struck me that he lived at a considerable distance from it. I little thought at the time that this question of distance was soon to become of such moment. I reached Austin's house after ten minutes' brisk walk ; it must have been quite half a mile away on the farther side of the town. The road in which he lived was called Delacy Crescent, and his landlady, I had been told, was a Mrs. Hopkins.

I must be excused for introducing another landlady. I cannot help myself. By a strange coincidence, all the persons connected with this murder had been living in lodgings at the time of its occurrence—Miss Raynell, the two Harveys, the two Simpkinsons. I accordingly found myself confronted with landladies at every step. They might have been very useful to me, perhaps.

In the got-up stories of crime they always are. As a matter of fact, in my case, I obtained no help from them whatever.

I asked for Austin Harvey, and heard, as I expected to hear, that he had gone out. Further questioning about his probable movements revealed that he had received two telegrams, and had left the house almost immediately afterwards. So far, so good.

Mrs. Hopkins was not unnaturally curious about the telegrams. I regretted that I was unable to afford her any information. In revenge I plied her with cautious questions about the Rev. Austin. I found her voluble. The Rev. Austin was, it appeared, in every sense of the word, a "model" clergyman and lodger, "quite the "gentleman," and "such a nice-looking, good young man." If anything, he had a weakness for the softer sex. "Quite the man for the ladies, sir," said good Mrs. Hopkins, "as, in fact, every curate ought to be."

The question of the clergyman's habits, important as it might seem, was still one of secondary interest to me. The matter of real moment remained. Could it be proved that he had spent the night of Sunday at home, in his own room? If so, I must begin the whole inquiry over again.

Mrs. Hopkins was hospitable. She invited me into her parlor, and gave me a glass of currant wine and a biscuit. She introduced me to her daughter, Lucy, nineteen, yellow fringe, and an impudent little nose. I was very glad to make the acquaintance of Lucy. I thought that, perhaps, she might be useful to me, as indeed she was—at the same time I did not make much progress. It was difficult to get at the truth without betraying myself. More than that, I soon saw it was impossible, so I spoke out as I had done with the woman in whose house the murder had been committed. Why not? I must clear up the whole matter to-day.

Within twenty-four hours, Austin Harvey would know all the particulars of my conversation with Mrs. Hopkins. True, but before twenty-four hours were over, I must know definitely whether Austin Harvey was the murderer or not.

"Mrs. Hopkins," I said, "I am a detective. Miss Raynell, as you are aware, has been murdered. Mr. Harvey is her heir. He has probably nothing to do with the crime, but to bring that out, once for all, it is important he should be able to prove that he did not leave this house during the night on which the crime was committed."

I saw the girl start. She avoided my eyes, however, and sat looking out of the window. Mrs. Hopkins required a moment or two to recover from her amazement, but when she found breath, she burst into a volley of exclamations and protestations, which I calmly allowed to rattle past. At length, she calmed down sufficiently, and I gathered from her the following facts:—

The Rev. Austin had officiated at evening service on Sunday. He had preached. Mrs. Hopkins and Lucy had heard him. The service was over by half-past eight. Then there had been a mission service in the schoolroom. Lucy had remained for it. It had lasted till about 9.30, or a little later. Miss Lucy had come immediately after it was over, and had been in the house before ten. Both mother and daughter were sure of this, and Austin had come in shortly after her. He had rung at the front-door, and Mrs. Hopkins herself had admitted him. He looked tired and worried, and was very pale. He had said to her on the stairs, "I have been delayed a few moments after the meeting by some people wanting to speak to me, otherwise I should have been glad to see your daughter home. It is not half-past ten yet, is it?" and Mrs. Hopkins, looking at the clock in the hall, had said, "Just on the stroke, sir;" and, as she said these words, the clock had struck. She remembered all

this distinctly—the more so because of the talk about the murder afterwards. Mr. Harvey had said, “Well, good-night, I’m very tired,” and he had gone up and locked himself into his bedroom.

All this was very disappointing. According to all probability, the murder had been committed early in the night, before the unfortunate lady had attempted to undress. I had come to this conclusion in spite of the tumbled bed and emptied glass. I believe that these accessories had merely been used to lead the investigation astray. The deed had not been done in the morning—it must, then, have been done before midnight.

If Austin was concerned in it, he must, accordingly, have left his rooms again and betaken himself to the Marine Parade. Now, though I must verify my distances, I knew already that if Austin’s lodgings were about half a mile from the church, the house on the Marine Parade must be at least a mile farther yet, on the

opposite side. Austin's church, and, still more, his apartments, were altogether outside the town, in a suburb. It was quite impossible that he could have got to his aunt's house and back in barely three-quarters of an hour.

"All that proves nothing," I said; "what I want to know is, was he in his room all night?"

Again I saw the daughter start.

"And of course," said Mrs. Hopkins, indignantly; "and where else should a gentleman be, pray? And what do you mean coming and asking such questions? I went up to my own bed at eleven, and I heard him breathing heavily in his sleep, which is a way he has; and next morning he got his hot water regular; and I, who sleep as light as a feather, as if I shouldn't have heard, indeed, if gentlemen were to go walking about the house at night."

Mrs. Hopkins was very much ruffled.

"All the same," I said coolly; "we want proof."

Mrs. Hopkins sniffed angrily. I rose to take my leave. There was nothing more to be got out of the landlady. The girl, Lucy, jumped up from her seat simultaneously, and ran forward.

"Don't you trouble, mother," she said ; "I'll let the gentleman out."

As we passed into the hall, she closed the parlor door behind her. Then she faced me.

"Is he accused?" she gasped ; "is he in danger?"

I saw my chance, and caught at it.

"In very great danger," I said impressively, "unless we can get to know exactly what he did that night."

The girl faltered. Her color came and went. She made once or twice as if she would speak, and stopped short.

"All depends on that," I said.

"He never left the house," she burst out suddenly ; "I know he never did."

"Ah, well, my dear," I said ; "but do you know it?"

"I do," she hissed. "Never mind. Don't ask me. We were to have been married. I had never, never listened to him before. Don't tell my mother. He promised me. There, I've ruined myself to save him—but he never left the house till eight o'clock next day."

She began to sob so violently that I had to hurry off and leave her in the hall, much to my regret. I was afraid her mother would find us there together. It would have been extremely awkward.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE ARREST.

As I left the house, and walked down the crescent, two results of my visit stood out clearly in my mind. The first was this: That it seemed, humanly speaking, entirely *impossible* that Austin Harvey could have been concerned in the murder. And the second was this, that, morally, at anyrate, the man might be considered capable of the crime. His sweetness, his powers of pleasing—all that had attracted and blinded me—all this was a mask, far more effective even than his profession and clerical dress. The man was a scoundrel.

This discovery, or rather this confirmation of the vague disquiet of the last twenty-four hours, brought the possibility of Austin Harvey's guilt so much the nearer

at the very moment when the actual facts seemed to remove it altogether beyond my grasp. I walked over the distance, and carefully measured them. My worst fears proved true. Austin lived more than a mile and a half from his aunt's lodgings, and his church stood at about one-third of the whole distance from his house. If it was true, as the girl had said—and I had no reason to doubt her—that he had not left the house all night after he had once returned to it from the evening service, then the only time which I had not yet fully accounted for was the period from 9.45 to 10.30. Surely it was utterly impossible that he could in that time have walked two miles and a half, and done all that he had to do in the house.

Was he, then, innocent? I knew he was not. There seemed to be just one chance for me. He might have driven in some conveyance from the church and back. It hardly seemed likely. For, if he had done

so, it would have been as if he had summoned up testimony against himself.

I made inquiries in the town, with which I need not trouble the reader. They led me to the not unexpected conclusion that on Sunday, and at that time of night, the curate could not have used a cab without my being able to trace it. I was not able to trace it, and I became entirely convinced that no conveyance had been used.

The afternoon wore away during these investigations. The more hopeless the facts seemed to become, the more desperately resolved I felt that the crime *must* be traced home to Austin Harvey. He was the guilty man. I knew it. He shall not escape, I said. Nevertheless, at seven, I resolved to go back to London. I had seen the clerk of St. Mary's. I had again seen the deaf old landlady at Miss Raynell's house. I had not learnt anything really new, except that Austin had left the vestry immediately after the second service, in

great haste, before 9.45. I was hungry, tired, and disappointed. I turned my steps in the direction of the railway station.

As I reached it, the boys were crying the evening papers. One thing they were calling out naturally attracted my attention. "Arrest of the murderer! Arrest of the murderer!"

I stopped a boy who was passing, and bought an *Echo*. I opened it, and looked hastily through it, almost with an intuition of what I should find. There it was, in large letters.

"Third Edition—Arrest of the Black-Box Murderer at Dijon.—Philip Harvey, the man who is believed by the police to have murdered Miss Raynell, was arrested last night in the express train between Paris and Marseilles. The arrest was effected at the Dijon Station."

CHAPTER XXVI.

A SHOT.

I WENT straight home, with that newspaper in my hand, like a man dazed. I found Austin Harvey waiting for me in my sitting-room. Without a word of greeting or explanation, I walked up to him, and thrust the paper under his eyes. He read the news it brought. It frightened him very much. I was glad it frightened him.

"And what is to be done now?" he gasped.

"Done!" I replied bitterly; "the law must take its course, and the guilty man must swing."

Austin did not speak. I saw he could not.

"But they will have to prove, first," I continued, looking closely at him, "that he is the guilty man, and how he did it."

Austin's face twitched nervously.

"Surely," he said at last, with a great effort, "that is plain enough; only too plain."

"It is not plain at all, as yet, to me, Mr. Harvey," I answered, still staring him in the face; "and the more I investigate the case, the less plain it becomes to me. I am not at all sure that, as yet, we have found the right explanation."

We stood watching each other. Neither of us dared to say anything more. At this stage of my knowledge, I asked myself whether I had not already hinted too much. I had made Austin uneasy—that I could see. He was much perturbed by his brother's arrest, and he had a vague feeling that my whole manner was pregnant with some meaning inimical to himself. It would not do to put him on his guard before I had proof.

Proof, then, I *must* have. Philip's arrest only accentuated the need for immediate action. But what could I do? How was

Austin responsible? What part had he played? To these questions I had no answer, and Austin's *alibi* was as perfect as any man could wish.

We talked of Philip's arrest and its imminent consequences, and so got on to safer ground. Austin declared repeatedly that it was absolutely impossible for him to neglect his clerical duties any longer. He must get back by the last train that night. I tried hard to persuade him to go to Paris. I should have been only too glad to know him out of the way for a time. Surely, I thought, some suggestion must turn up, some indication must come to the fore. But Austin insisted on remaining. It was decided that I should return to Paris that very night, and watch the case as best I might. I could not deny that—from Austin's standpoint—this was the best thing that could be done. I could find no reasonable excuse for refusing his request, and—as Southend appeared unable to

furnish me with the desired explanation—I must admit I was not unwilling to go back to Paris and to Philip Harvey. Perhaps I might be more successful there.

I took leave, then, of Austin—or rather we started together, each for his particular station. What a quantity of ground we had both traveled over in the last forty-eight hours! And yet I, for one, did not feel any physical fatigue, though I was certainly morally exhausted and harassed by my ill-success. It vexed me exceedingly that I was obliged to receive this man—to speak to him, and to let him depart again without taxing him with what I knew to be his crime. Strangely enough, the more impossible it seemed the more convinced I became that he was the murderer. But, nevertheless, I had to deliberate with him about his brother as if I believed every lying word he said.

We were going down a quiet street together, when something flashed by us in

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the darkness, and at the same moment an idea—a hope—a possibility—flashed across my brain. A cyclist had just passed us.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE CHALLENGE.

I TURNED to Austin Harvey on the spur of the moment.

"You cycle, do you not," I said.

It was like an inspiration. He broke out fiercely, with a sudden oath,—

"Damn you," he said. "What do you know? How little? How much?"

He struck me over the face with his clenched fist, and darted down the street.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

FOLLOWING UP THE CLUE.

As soon as I had recovered from the bewilderment of the blow, I pulled myself together and walked on. I did not hurry. I made no futile attempt to overtake the runaway cleric. I felt sure now—sooner or later—everything would come right. I did not start for Paris. I went to the other station, and caught the Southend train. I looked in vain for the curate—he did not turn up. I got into the train, all the same. At that moment I could not stop him or catch him. Fortunately he would not be able to fly far before to-morrow morning, and I must find out about that cycle at once.

I have called the idea an inspiration. It was not that. It was just merely a

happy combination. In seeing the cyclist pass me, it had suddenly struck me that a cycle gets over the ground even faster than a cab. As a mere shot I had said out my thought aloud to Austin Harvey, and it had struck fearfully and unexpectedly home. The unhappy man had betrayed himself. He must, then, indeed have murdered his aunt in those brief moments. Apparently he had used a bicycle to reach the house. I could compute nothing further till I knew where he had obtained the machine.

It was past eleven by the time I reached Mrs. Hopkins' house for the second time that day. The house was dark. The whole family were in bed. Never mind, I rang and knocked till I woke them. Mrs. Hopkins appeared at a window, and I asked whether her reverend lodger was in the house. He was not; he had not come home all day. Then Mrs. Hopkins must admit me instantly. I had important matters to arrange with her, in the name

of the law. Mrs. Hopkins obeyed with alarmed and inquisitive alacrity.

Presently we were sitting in the parlor again—Mrs. Hopkins in dignified undress—by the light of a flickering candle. The daughter came peeping into the room, pale and anxious, with her hair in curl-papers. I put her out gently, and closed the door.

"Mrs. Hopkins," I said, "is there a cycling machine of any kind in this house?"

"Lor' bless you, Mr. Detective," said Mrs. Hopkins, "and what do you come here for at such a time of night to ask me such a question as that?"

"But is there?"

"Yes, there is, if you must know, then."

I could have kissed the woman.

"There's an old one belonging to my boy Jimmy, but it hasn't been used for six months and more."

"Show it to me."

Mrs. Hopkins grumbled a good deal at this, but ultimately decided to obey. She

led me out, still with the candle, which only flickered the more in the night air, to a small, oblong plot at the back of the house. In one corner of this plot was a tool-shed with an unlocked door; and in the shed a bicycle, certainly not of the latest make, leant up against the wall. There was a back entrance to the yard, as I immediately noticed on entering it.

I stooped down and examined the machine. I took it out and rolled it up and down the little garden. The wheels moved quite easily. It had certainly been recently oiled.

"You say it has not been used within the last six months?" I asked.

"No, indeed. Who would use it? My son is away in London."

"Mr. Harvey never cycles that you know?"

"Mr. Harvey? The Rev. Mr. Harvey? Good gracious, no! It's a sport that's scarcely befitting a clergyman, I should say," said Mrs. Hopkins.

"Well, opinions may vary as to that, Mrs. Hopkins," I said.

I put the machine back into the shed. There was no doubt as to its being available for actual use.

"And Mr. Harvey has a key to that door?" I remarked, pointing to the back entrance.

"Yes, he has. He wanted a latch-key when he took the rooms, but I wouldn't let him have one. We're two women alone in the house, and the neighborhood's lonesome; so we agreed for him to use this back door, where he has to come past our bedroom, and I lock and bolt the front door at eleven, whether he's in or not, you see."

I did see. Not that it mattered much, for he could easily have had the key made had he not possessed one.

I took leave of Mrs. Hopkins, and went in search of some place where I might pass the night. I did not attempt to bind her over to secrecy. It would have been of no

use. Besides, alive or dead, I was pretty
nigh sure of my man by this time.

CHAPTER XXIX.

I BEGIN TO UNDERSTAND.

It was now possible for me to reconstruct the crime,—or, at least, my idea of it,—with a fair amount of accuracy. Presumably Austin Harvey had premeditated the murder of his aunt with a view to obtaining definite possession of her property before she again changed her will. The whole thing had been cleverly planned; the murderer's one preoccupation being to prove an *alibi*. In this effort he had been apparently successful. He could, of course, prove his presence in church up to past half-past nine. He could prove that he had reached his home before half-past ten, "having walked back," as he would probably say, "along the cliffs." And he had made further arrangements—the scoundrel

—so as to prove that he had not left the house all night.

No one, he fancied, would accuse him of walking two miles and a half, committing a murder, and unpacking a box full of books in considerably less than an hour, and herein, certainly, he judged rightly. He knew, with but one or two other people,—the inmates of the house,—of the existence of the bicycle in the back shed; he could get to it unnoticed; probably—no, certainly—he had cycled in his youth before he ever took orders or came to Southend. No one would dream of so unlikely an explanation, for—to begin with—no one would ever suspect him at all. He must have rushed home from the church, and then done the two miles and a half which still remained to be accounted for on the machine. That would leave him a quarter of an hour more for what he had to do in the house. Enough in my judgment.

The crime once committed, nothing remained but to throw the whole blame on

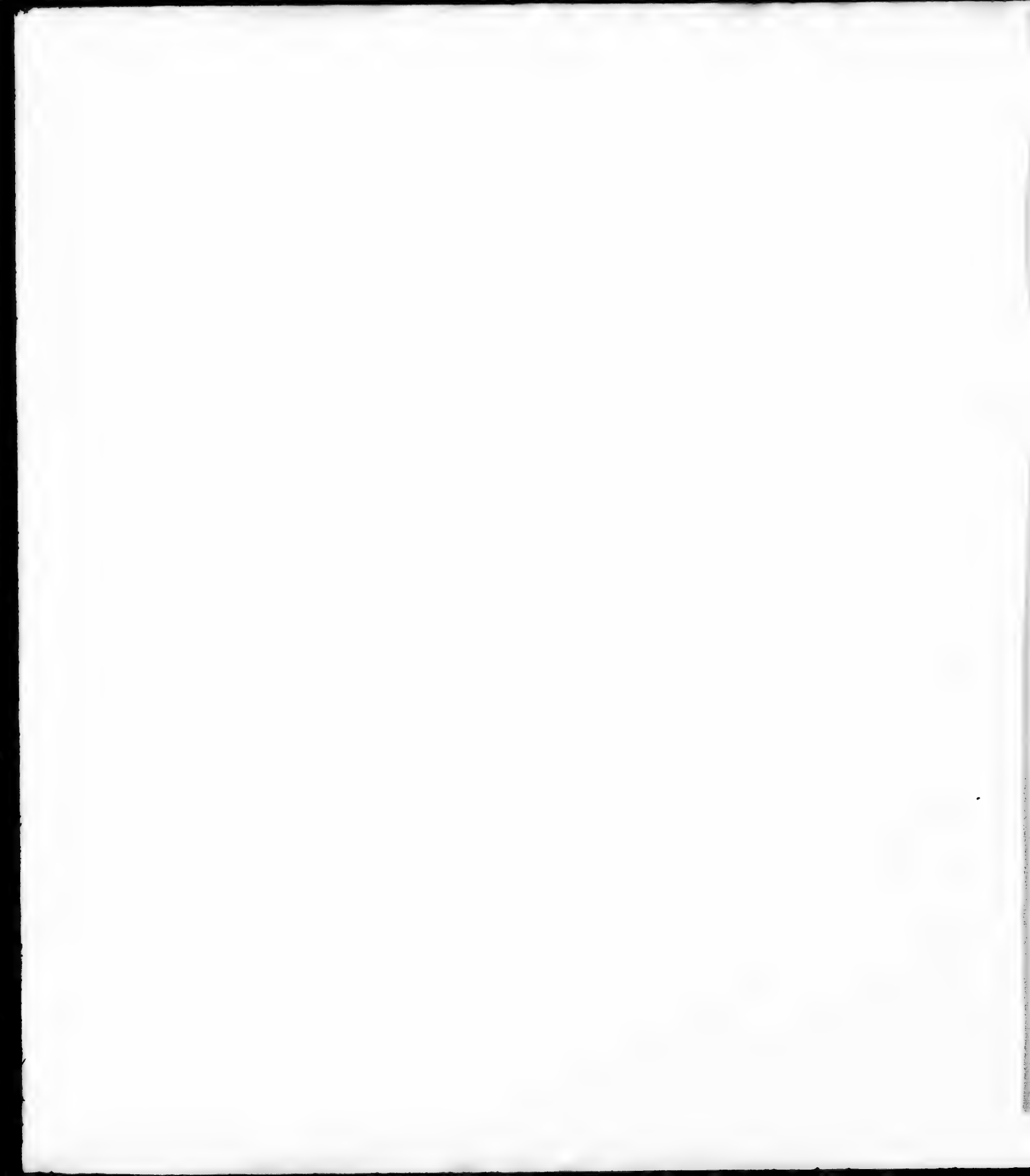
his brother, the natural "suspect." On the one hand, this seemed a monstrous wickedness; on the other, it became much more intelligible when it was remembered to what extent the rivalry for the hand of Miss Simpkinson had probably separated the two brothers, in spite of former affection. True, Philip had always spoken of his elder brother with attachment and even admiration: but then Philip was the successful aspirant to the lady's heart, even though Austin had gained her hand, and success in such matters is apt to soften as much as failure makes hard. Austin, no doubt, would consider he had barely gained his cause as long as he had not ousted his brother out of Miss Simpkinson's preference. There was one way, and one only, by which he might perhaps attain both ends—his own safety and his rival's downfall. What wonder if he took it, even though that rival happened to be his brother? There are no natural affections in jealousy and war.

And now, suddenly, viewed in this light, all Austin's conduct in Paris became clear to me. Once the murder was committed, he must have had two ends equally in view—one to fasten the guilt publicly on his brother, the other to rescue that brother from the hands of justice. He did not—you may be sure—want to bring his brother to the gallows. What he wanted was to get Philip safely away to some distant land, whence he could never return, and then, equally safely and peacefully, to enjoy the possession of the lady and the money. He would probably have done all he could to make his brother comfortable under the circumstances.

I could now understand how especially useful for his object the services of a private detective would be. My help was just the very thing he wanted, and he seized upon it with great adroitness. I must find out Philip's guilt, and so frighten the man himself into full belief of it and flight. To attain this he had given me just the neces-

sary amount of information—and withheld it from the police.

And the letter dropped on the stairs! Great heaven, it must have been dropped on purpose! Austin's whole visit to me must have been made with the one object of letting that letter fall under my eyes as he went out. I began to feel sure of this, now I thought about it. His return to my room, the expostulation, the fight over the compromising document, these were merely got up to stifle any suspicion which might have arisen in my breast. A man who is playing a part is always ultra-anxious and he often overdoes it, because he can never quite release himself from the fear that the person to be deluded must somehow notice what he, the deceiver, so plainly sees, *i.e.*, the deceit. I remembered how unexpectedly Austin Harvey's strength had seemed to collapse during the struggle. I had remarked it at the time. I now felt sure that this was part of his prearranged plot; and that he, young and athletic as he was,



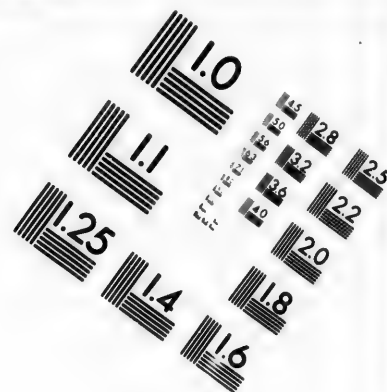
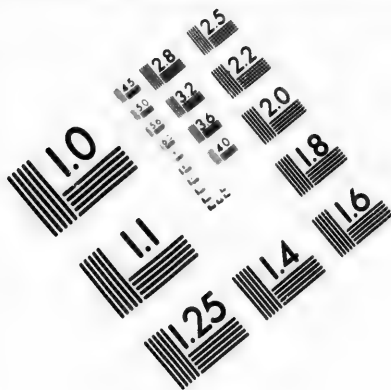
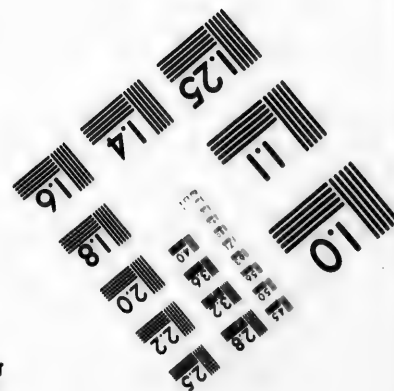
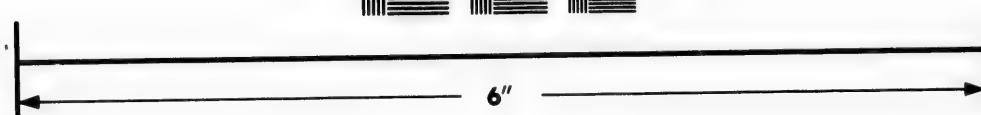
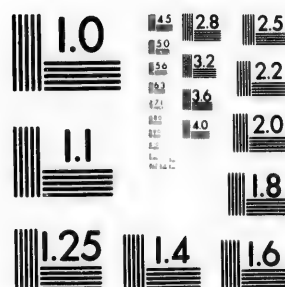


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could easily have got the better of me if he had chosen to do so.

And now I understood why the facts of the case had dawned upon me so conveniently at first. The murderer himself had been helping me, and refusing all help to the Government detectives. His whole computation was built up on the hope that the police would find out the truth a few days later than I. In that interval Philip would be compelled to fly. This plan had, as we have seen, succeeded and failed simultaneously. The Scotland Yard people had come after me, certainly, but they had followed too closely on my heels, and they had snapped up Philip before he could get away. Part of this, no doubt, was due to Austin's mismanagement; but part of it, also, could be accounted for by Philip's unwillingness to recognize his imaginary guilt.

In reality, then, while I had been sneering in my own heart at the authorities, they had been getting on as fast as they could under the circumstances; while I,

who had thought so much of my success, had simply been a tool in the hands of a man ten times more cunning than I was. Still, I had gone off the track he had marked out for me as soon as I realized the facts of the case, and ultimately I had outwitted him altogether. I could be proud of that, and rightly so. It was not Austin Harvey's intention that I should brand Austin Harvey as the guilty man. And now, what must I do next? Could I prove what I asserted? If I could, should I go immediately to Scotland Yard and give in the case? But what were my indications of Austin's guilt? A luggage-label, found in his pocket; a loop in his handwriting; a knot which had been untied a week ago. Pshaw! evidence I had none.

And Philip was already under arrest, with all the weight of suspicion lying heavy on his shoulders. Very probably he would confess his guilt. Very probably Austin was, even at this moment, hurrying away towards complete security. The idea got

hold of me that, in spite of my discoveries, the case was going wrong. Austin would get away; Philip would be condemned; no one would believe me.

That idea drove me simply frantic. I paced the streets all night, and, having set a Southend policeman to watch Austin's house, I went back to London by the very earliest train. I had not had a regular sleep since my night in the Saracen's Head, and even that had been a disturbed one. After that I had spent a night on the Channel, then a second night on the Channel, and now I was roaming up and down through the streets of Southend. I cannot say I felt tired. The hunting fever was upon me.

CHAPTER XXX.

SCOTLAND YARD GIVES ITS OPINION.

ON arriving in London, I went first to my rooms, actuated by some vague hope that Austin Harvey might be waiting for me there. I was not surprised to find this hope a mere delusion. I had scarcely trusted to it, and its unreasonableness seemed clear enough. So I betook myself to Scotland Yard, and easily succeeded in getting hold of the man who had managed the Black-Box inquiry. I had a number of acquaintances among the detectives at Scotland Yard.

I found everybody talking about the murder, and elated at the capture. Bunsby, the fellow who had settled it all, was the hero of the day.

"Oh, yes," he said to me, "it's all as clear as ditch-water, now, I can tell you.

There never was a hitch after we once got hold of the right clue. I only wish we could have got the old lady at Paris to speak up sooner. The daughter's no good. Once I knew about the nephew, it was all plain sailing. And we caught the fellow just as he was making a run for it. Very nearly gave us the slip!"

"And you're quite sure you've got the right nephew?" I said.

"Sure! Bless you, yes. Besides, the fellow's confessed."

"He has, has he?" I cried, with an involuntary oath. "Poor fellow! God help him, then!"

The exclamation—a strong one—had burst from me. Mr. Bunsby surveyed me with indignant surprise. One or two other men in the room came forward from curiosity.

"Look here," I said desperately, "confession's the French way, and I daresay they squeezed it out of him. Never mind. Only, mind you, I've been looking into this

case for the family, and I say, 'Don't be too sure you've got the right man yet. In any case, arrest his brother too, if you can, and you'll be the better for it. He may turn out an accomplice.'

There was a general howl of derision. Government detectives naturally do not care to take advice from private ones. They distrust them, and look upon them as so many will-o'-the-wisps (intentional ones, often) in that swamp of crime on which the policeman's bull's-eye sheds its certain radiance.

"And that shows," said Mr. Bunsby sententially, "what a mistake it is for you fellows to meddle in our cases. I presume you allude to the Rev. Austin Harvey. Now, I have looked very carefully into the matter, and I have accordingly made inquiries also about the Rev. Austin Harvey, although there is not a shadow of a suspicion connected with his name. He is a highly-respected clergyman of the Church of England; and, besides that, he was at

home, and in his own bed, all through the night of the murder. So there!"

Mr. Bunsby spread himself out, with his hands in his pockets, and stood watching me triumphantly.

"You are quite sure of all that?" I asked.

"Quite sure. You needn't try to bewilder us, sir; it's not worth your trouble. The case is too plain this time. I've got it all worked out like a sum in rule of three. Philip Harvey's done the deed, and Philip Harvey 'll swing for it."

What could I do with the man? I saw that further efforts would be useless—at least at this moment. A sick helplessness came over me. Suddenly I realized that I was dead-tired. I went back to my own lodgings in a moral condition very like despair.

CHAPTER XXXI.

AND AUSTIN WINDS UP THE CASE.

As I crept slowly up my stairs, I kept on repeating to myself that it was no use, the law must take its course. After all, it was no business of mine. If the authorities blundered, they must bear the responsibility; it would not be the first innocent man they had hanged. And if Philip Harvey had chosen to confess himself guilty of a crime he had never committed, so much the worse for him. I must leave him to his fate. And yet—

I opened my sitting-room door, and found myself face to face with Austin Harvey.

There he stood, on the other side of the table, between the windows, his face turned from the light. None the less, I could see

that he was very pale and worn-looking, and that there was a feverish sparkle in his clear, blue eyes. He stood with his arms crossed over his broad chest, in his long clerical coat, handsome, and stalwart, and still.

"What is it?" I said, as soon as I could find speech. "What have you come here for, Mr. Harvey? What do you want with me?"

"I want to speak to you," said Austin, in a dull voice; "and I want to ask you something. It is true that Philip is arrested?"

"Of course it is true," I replied, not pausing to note whether there was an interrogation in his voice or not. "Have you come here to ask me that?"

"I have come for a good deal more," Austin answered, in a voice full of meaning and menace. "I believe it is true. I have not seen the morning papers; I did not dare to buy them. Have you got one?"

"No ; but Philip's caught. His guilt is proved, and he'll be hung in a week or two. And now, you—you assassin and fratricide, what do you come whining here for? Go home, and marry the woman who loves him."

Even as I spoke, however, I moved towards the bell. There was only one in the room. Austin saw the movement, and placed himself in front of the corner I had in view.

"You are going to try and get me arrested?" he said contemptuously. "No, no, my friend, you will bide my own time for that."

There was a quiet, ominous way about him which compelled me to listen. I faced him, and bade him say his say.

"You honestly and truly believe," said Austin, "that Philip will be condemned?"

"Yes ; he has confessed."

"And his guilt is clear to the authorities?"

"They think so; but I know, you coward, that you are the man."

"And why do you want to have me arrested, if you cannot prove your charge?"

"We shall see," I said fiercely. "Truth may triumph yet."

Before the words were out of my throat, Austin had flung himself upon me, his heavy hand pressed tight across my mouth. He bore me down with him, and in another moment, before I could utter a sound, he was busy tying my hands with a silk handkerchief. He finished the work deliberately, and then he secured my feet with the tablecloth. I lay helpless in the great physical strength of the man. I recalled, even at that moment, how accurate had been my supposition with regard to the struggle in Paris. He could have crushed me at any time.

When he had completed his work, he came and stood over me, and slowly, from his left hand trousers pocket, he drew a bright little revolver. I could not com-

mand the working of my features at the sight of such a weapon in the hands of such a man.

"Never fear," said Austin sadly, "I am not going to kill you unless you oblige me to."

I could not answer him; but in my heart I said to myself, "You will have to kill me before you force me to do a wrong to your wretched brother." And yet, I could not help pitying the man, as I looked up at his miserable, handsome face.

"And now, listen to me," continued Austin, "and remember every word I say. There's nothing to keep me from leaving this country for ever. I've got my aunt's money in my pocket. Do you understand?"

I nodded assent.

"There's still less to keep me from pinching that throat of yours for a few minutes, and so stopping for ever all chatter about my share in the Black-Box Murder."

I nodded assent again.

"There's still less to keep me from quietly unfastening those bandages and going down into the street, leaving you to tell your version of the murder if you choose. Do you think any one will believe you?"

I made no sign.

"Do you think any one will believe you?" he repeated angrily, touching my prostrate body with his foot.

I was obliged reluctantly to shake my head. No; in fact I did not think any one would believe me.

"Nobody would," said Austin. "Very well. And yet you are right, and all the world is wrong. Do you hear that? Philip is innocent, and I am the murderer. And now, if I release you, what will you make of my confession? Take it to Scotland Yard? They will laugh at you and your bicycle, and when I tell them you are crazy, they will answer that they know that already."

There was something maddening about the man's cool strength. I struggled vainly with my bonds. He smiled a bitter, scornful smile.

"Lie still for a little," he said, "and hear the rest. As I was saying, you are right, and the Scotland Yard people are wrong. I murdered my aunt. I murdered her for love—not for the money, as you may think—but for love. The quarrel about Miss Simpkinson had been going on for weeks. I loved Miss Simpkinson. I worshipped the very ground she trod on. I did not think Philip worthy of her. I was sure that I should make her a better husband. I still believe I should have done so. My aunt maddened me with the constant ups and downs of her caprices. I knew that her last will appointed me her heir; but she was gradually changing. She had resolved, for some reason or other, that Philip must marry Miss Simpkinson if he wanted to. On Sunday afternoon she told me definitely that she was

going up to London early on the Monday morning to alter her will, and divide her money equally between us. She would tell Mrs. Simpkinson what she was doing, she said, before that lady started for Paris, and Mrs. Simpkinson must act accordingly. I saw this time that she meant it. If she lived to go up to her London lawyers, Edith Simpkinson was lost to me for ever. I loved the girl madly. I could not live without her. I hated my brother because of his successful love of her. I knew that she had accepted me partly to please her mother, and partly out of indignation at some escapades of Philip's, which I had been instrumental in bringing under her notice. I do not mind telling you now that some of the stories which thus reached her were exaggerated, to say the least. I knew that she would escape me if my aunt had her own way. I should lose her for ever. I could not bear the thought.

"I saw Philip that evening just before the seven o'clock service. He came to my

rooms for money. He had been taking too much wine, and I told him so. He drew out his handkerchief while he was with me, and he drew out his door-key with it. The door-key fell on the hearth-rug. I picked it up and put it in my pocket. That key was the origin of all the mischief. Had I not had it, I should never have thought of returning to my aunt's. I had seen her twice already, in the afternoon, and immediately after dinner. I had found her inflexible, and at the second interview we had quarreled. I picked up the key because I feared Philip would lose it—for no other reason. I repeat: had he not dropped it, the rest would not have happened.

"When I came out of church at 9.30, I rushed home. All through the services the key had been burning a hole in my pocket. I could not rest without seeing my aunt once more that night. To-morrow it would be too late. I must reason with her. Perhaps, after all, she would listen to me still.

I went round by the back way and took out the bicycle. I had used it once or twice before by night; never mind for what. I had been a great cyclist at the university, but had given it up entirely since my ordination. I felt now, however, that I should be too late if I walked over. My aunt always went to bed between ten and a quarter past. I made a rush for it. I swear to you— Do you follow me?"

Again he touched me slightly with his foot. Again I nodded—defiantly.

"I swear to you that I had not the slightest intention of injuring her in any way. I was desperate—mad with love. I had an idea that one last attempt might move her. I never dreamed of hurting her. I reached the house. All was already dark. I let myself in with Philip's key. I knew there was nobody in the house but the deaf old landlady, dozing or asleep downstairs. My aunt's rooms were on the ground floor, close by the door. The lights were out in the sitting-room. My brother's

door was shut, my aunt's ajar. I pushed my aunt's door open. A candle was burning on the dressing table. My aunt was lying, completely dressed, close to the door which communicated with Philip's room. She had fallen forward; her head had struck against a sofa arm. I have since conjectured that Philip roughly pushed her out of his room, and, at the same time, violently banged to the door, thereby covering the sound of her fall. Probably her foot had caught in her dress or the carpet.

"I went up to her. She was breathing: moving restlessly. She had only been stunned. I saw that she was rapidly coming to. I stood looking at her for a moment. In that moment the whole possibility flashed across my brain. I bent down by the door. I could hear Philip's heavy breathing. There was chloroform, I knew, on his table. I crept in. I could see, by the faint light, that he was lying across his bed, dressed, and asleep. (He must remember, you see, having woke

next morning in his clothes; and that, though I could not speak of it to him, increased his uncertainty.) I crept back with the bottle, and killed my aunt with her own handkerchief across her face. It was all done in a few minutes. Edith was mine; but now I must save myself, and Philip must bear the blame. It was the only way to secure Edith for ever. And he deserved it. Why had he tried to take her from me?

"Circumstances favored me. I dragged Philip's box out of the room. I unpacked it hurriedly, piling up its contents in the first cupboard I saw. Then I placed the dead body in it. I believe—I truthfully believe—it was dead by that time." Even Austin shuddered here. "I closed and corded the box as Philip had done. I took the key away with me, and next day I pretended to find it in my aunt's room. The latch-key I replaced in Philip's pocket.

"I tumbled the bed, and went into the sitting-room and drank out the glass of milk standing ready on the table. In any case, it would be safer to render it likely that the murder had been committed in the morning. That would perfect my *alibi*. I slipped out of the house, and rushed home on my bicycle. Then I went round to the front door. As I passed upstairs, I drew my landlady's attention to the fact that it was not yet half-past ten. I could have produced evidence, had such been required, that I did not leave the house again all night."

The blackguard! I knew he could.

"Next morning I accompanied Philip to London. It was believed that Miss Raynell had preceded us. As soon as I had committed the murder, I had grown wonderfully calm and collected. My one idea now was, I must admit, how best to implicate Philip. I saw to the luggage on our arrival, and it was at the London station that, happening to stand waiting next to

the box, I marked it with the letters 'P. H.,' in imitation of Philip's handwriting. I imitated them from memory, but I knew them well enough."

I, garrotted, bound down, listening helplessly to this story of the murder—I wisely kept my counsel here.

"At the same time," Austin went on, "I tore off the label which had been just stuck on at Southend. It was more than half detached already. I did it from the fancy that the letters would be the more easily seen the less labels were on the box. I wished them to be seen. I could not imagine that the box would get mixed up with others, and the letters effaced. Had I had the opportunity, I would have painted Philip's name on it in great white letters. I could not do that, so I marked it as best I was able. I threw the old label away."

Again the man he held at his mercy could have told him better.

"And now I come to the one great mishap in the whole story. My brother's box

and Miss Simpkinson's were exchanged at Charing Cross, and Miss Simpkinson got mixed up in the matter. I would have given anything to save her. It is impossible to say how it happened. My brother had insisted on looking after the luggage, and I had been obliged, much against my will, to stay with the ladies. The boxes were almost exactly similar. We had fetched the ladies at their hotel, where they had spent the night, and all the boxes had gone on one omnibus. Probably the maid pointed out the wrong box as her mistress'.

"My brother was to accompany the ladies as far as Dover, and to remain there. By that strange fatality which is the greatest auxiliary of the police, the box which contained my aunt's dead body traveled over to France in Mrs. Simpkinson's keeping, and was opened at the Paris station.

"I had intended my brother to take it with him to Dover. The body would be found in his possession. Probably he him-

self would find it. In any case, the full weight of suspicion would fall upon him.

"In this one point I failed utterly. With regard to other matters, I was fairly successful. You will probably have sense enough to understand by this time what use I made of you. You came in very conveniently. But you went further than I had intended, and found out more—damn you—than I had expected. However, all that is useless now. I swear to you that I had hoped from the very first to get Philip away in time. That was all I was striving for. And I took trouble enough about it, heaven knows. I wanted to frighten him into flight, through you. And he could have escaped, and there would have been an end of it. He would have left the field clear for me, and I should have provided for him out yonder. But there, his capture changes the whole thing. I can't have him hung. And, whatever happens, I've lost Edith. I had a letter from her yesterday to say that she had never loved me, that she had

always loved Philip—that she loved him all the more now he was in trouble, and that—murder or no murder—she would remain true to him for ever. That's my confession. Make of it what you can. If it's any use to Philip, I don't care. Tell Edith I always loved her; I love her still."

His words had been rising to a shriek. As he finished, he deliberately pointed the revolver to his left temple, and shot himself dead. He had intended, in shooting, to fall backwards, but, from the effect of the shot, he oscillated one moment towards me, and then fell right across my prostrate body with a heavy thud.

I tried to call out—of course I could not. I tried to struggle free—it was in vain. The dead body lay there, crushing me down, a warm, impassive weight. It was too horrible. I lost consciousness.

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Nothing remains to be told. The facts

worked themselves into their places; the Scotland Yard people unwillingly saw what they were obliged to see; the whole case was hushed up. I believe Miss Simpkinson carried off her poor, good-for-nothing lover to New Zealand or Australia, and that she ultimately married him there. I hope they were happy, but I cannot help having my doubts, unless Philip conquered that fatal propensity of his for drink. I have been told that he did, and that the terrible shock made a different man of him. Of course he came into his aunt's little fortune through Austin's death.

I left the service of the detective office not many months after the events narrated in this book, and, during the rest of my time there, I came across nothing in any way approaching in interest to the tragedy which remains known among a small set of individuals as the Black-Box Murder.

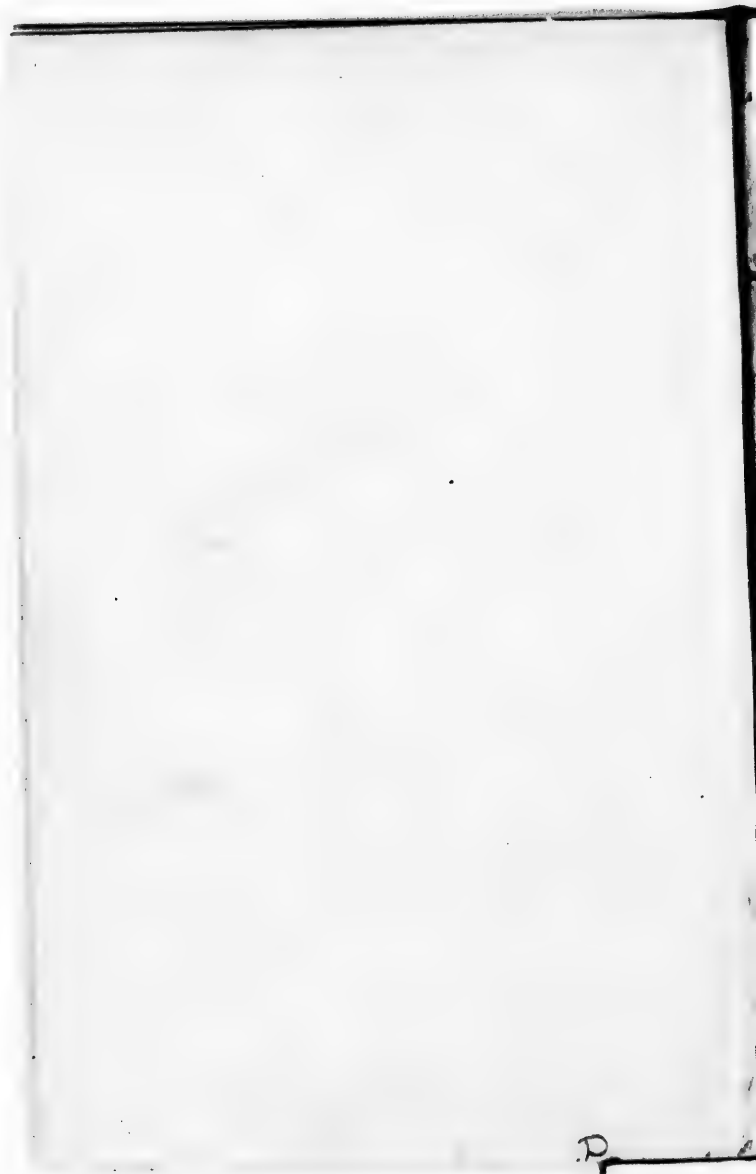
I have told my story as best as I could. I am not, as I said at the outset, a literary

THE BLACK-BOX MURDER.

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man, and I hope the reader will accordingly
pardon me all literary shortcomings, for
the sake of the interest of my tale.

THE END.



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